

ACCRA AIRPORT CITY. A Phronetic Study of Urban Development Theory, Practices and Forms at the Intersection of Global and Local: the Case of a West African Central Business

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of Global and Local: the Case of a West African Central Business District

Candidato: Arturo Pavani

Tutor: Matteo Robiglio

XXVIII° Ciclo di Dottorato

Corso di Laurea in Architettura, Costruzione e Città

Dipartimento di Architettura e Design

Politecnico di Torino

Aprile 2017





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## ABSTRACT

In the field of African urban studies, contemporary authors tend to agree upon the fact that current research should focus on its ability to have ‘a real impact’ on the urban environment. Academic research has in fact the power to provide better analytical tools for its quantitative and/or qualitative understanding, which would enable the practitioners and stakeholders in charge of its development to make better-informed decisions. In time, the academic world and the world of practice seem to have grown farther apart, something that is evident from the instruments that they utilize. The market reports upon which Real Estate developers and governments base their decisions use first-hand data and interviews to give a ‘feel’ of the market, while academic literature mostly relies upon theory and abstraction. Scientific research has the power to shed the light on otherwise inexplicable trends and dynamics, but it somehow seems fail to connect with the decision makers that have the actual power to affect the evolution of the contemporary urban environment.

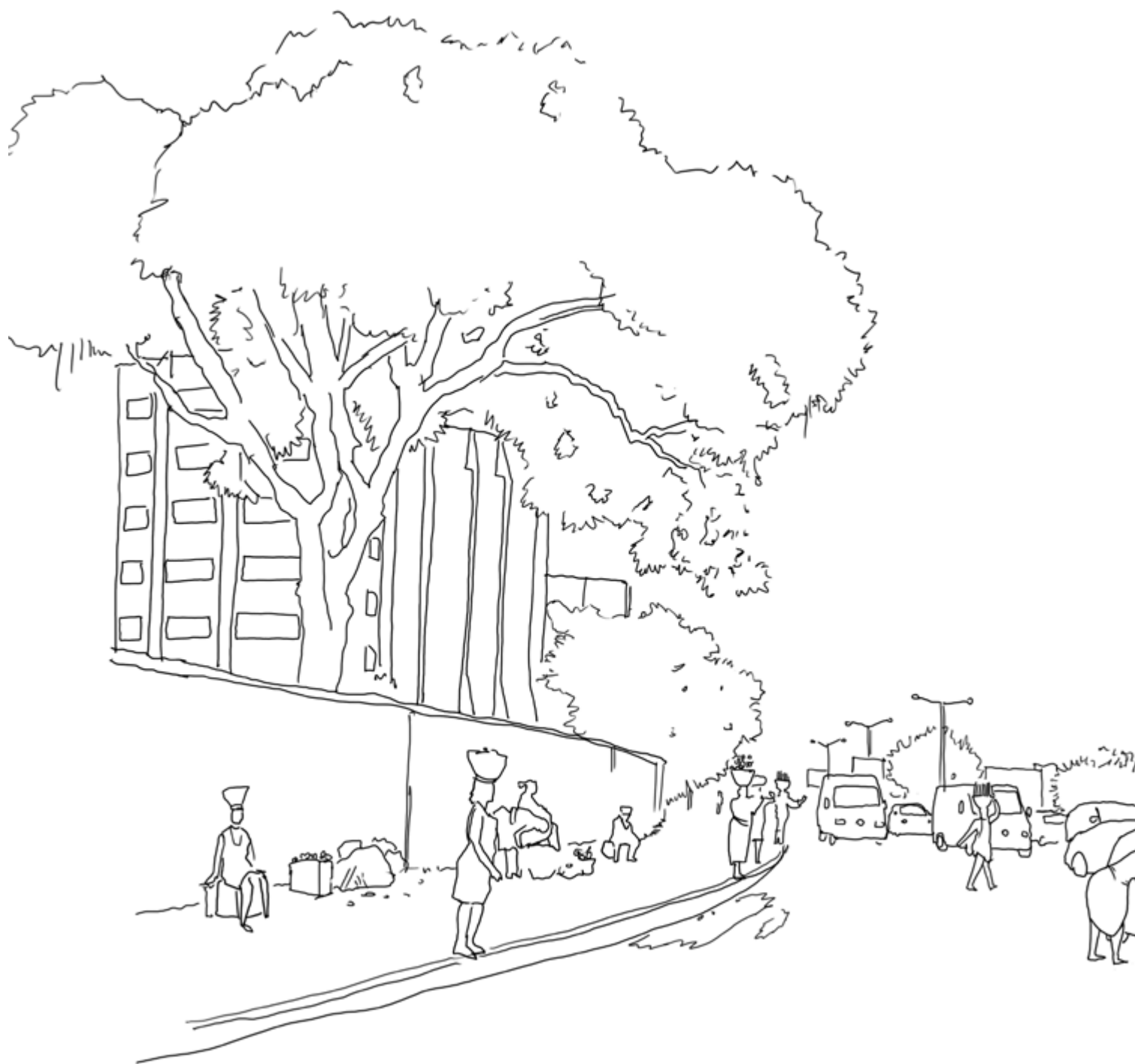
Recognizing the values of both worlds, this thesis attempts to counter this phenomenon by reversing the traditional deductive approach of urban research. Here, the forms and dynamics that shape the urban environment are investigated by combining the instruments of market analysis and academic research, using a problem-driven and phronetic approach that starts from local practices and later reframes them within scientific literature. This thesis first analyzes the scientific theory about African and Global cities and then, a specific case study, the Airport City business district in Accra (Ghana) to investigate what are the specific characteristics that influence its urban and architectural development, starting from

the analysis of its practices and forms. These are elaborated to form what Clifford Geertz' conceptualized as a 'thick description', which is used to contextualize the issues that emerge from the analysis within its specific social and cultural context. Interviews, photographs, first-hand data and documents are utilized to illustrate the characteristics of the case study, outlining its specificities and the power dynamics behind them. The themes that emerge from the analysis of theory, practices and forms are successively integrated within the broader scientific discourse. Ultimately, they are evaluated according to the phronetic planning research method with the goal to elaborate proposals for practical action towards their improvement. This research' purpose is to expose, understand and effectively communicate these issues, improving on the specific knowledge about African cities, Accra, and the implications that the local dynamics that it unearths might have within the global urban picture.

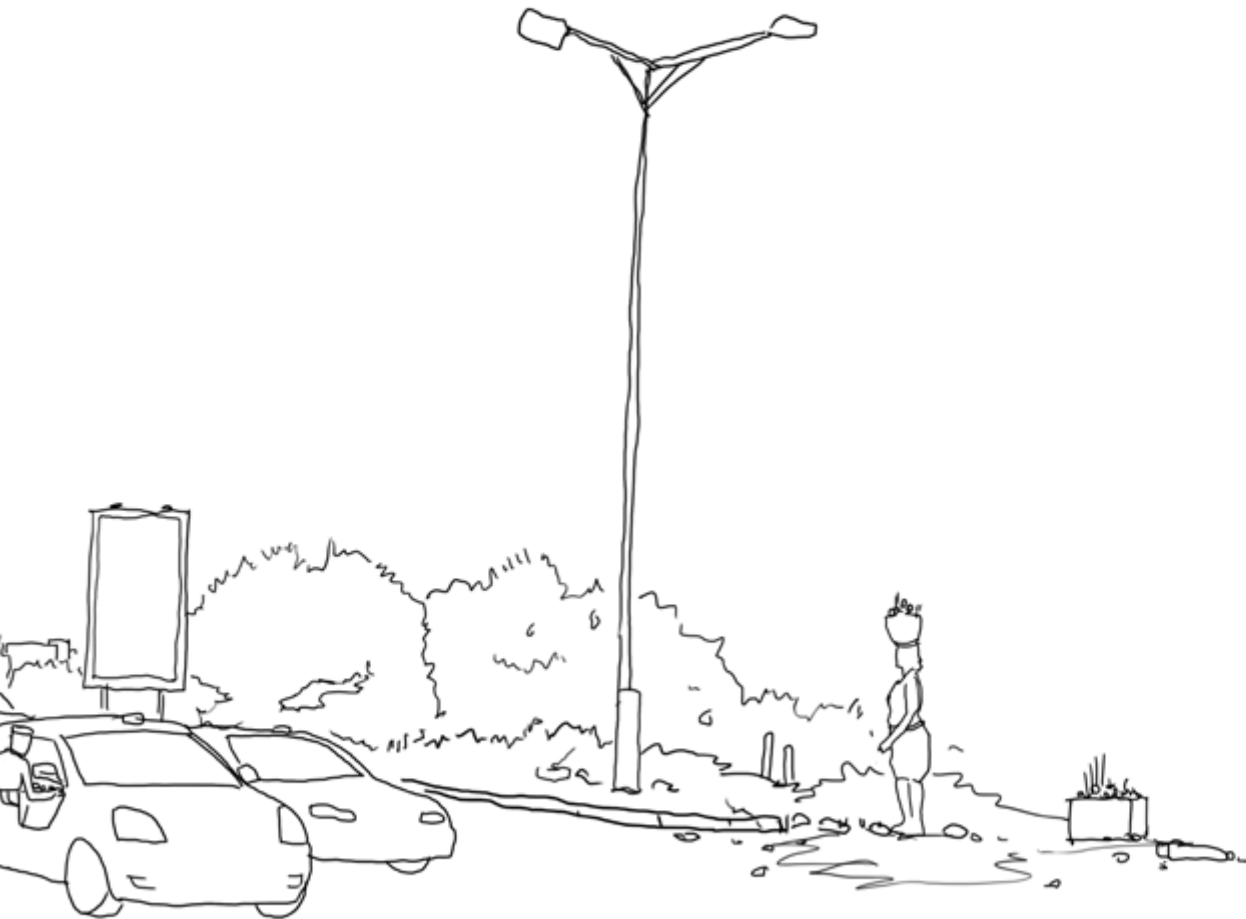
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# INTRODUCTION





In the contemporary urban studies landscape, the adoption of a phronetic approach fits well within the generally shared appeal about urban research' need to 'emanate 'from' rather than 'towards' the African city (Mbembé & Nuttall, 2004).

Phronesis, as defined by Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), is practical wisdom on how to address and act on problems in a particular context. The goal of phronetic social science is to produce research that has relevance to decisions about what can and should be done, and how to do it. Phronetic planning research explores current practices and historic circumstances to find solutions to practical problems. The underlying idea is that practical rationality, like judgment, is best understood through the exposition to case studies – whether experienced or narrated. Flyvbjerg argues that the development of social research is inhibited by the detachment between its abstract results and 'real' practice, which is why phronetic research anchored to its specific context, its actors and issues. Not being organized around specific methods of data collection, its only discriminant is to choose the strategy that best promotes change regarding the issues at hand. The result of phronetic research is a pragmatic interpretation of the practices. The construction and expression of a point of view whose purpose is to incrementally increase the level of knowledge about a specific context and the issues that characterize it, with the goal of positively influencing practical action towards their improvement.

In that sense, the African urban environment can be a source of both inspiration and despair, but it definitely deserves more research, especially given its scale, the models of innovation and the implications that its dynamics have an influence on – both globally and locally.



# 1.1 A PHRONETIC STUDY

## 1.1.1. The Gap

Contemporary urban research, and social sciences at large, is redefining its role within society, the academic discourse, and the realm of profession. The approaches and methodologies utilized in social sciences are evolving, and the advent of modern technologies has expanded exponentially the number of instruments available to researchers. Satellite imagery, big data, GIS, and university networks now provide researchers with tools and means unimaginable just twenty years ago. When it comes to urban research in the African continent, the relative scarcity of theoretical work combined with the logistical difficulties in conducting local research have contributed to great levels of experimentation when it comes to research methodologies and approaches.

It is important to be open to a wide range of methodological approaches – from literary criticism or archival analysis to statistical surveys and geographical information systems science. The terrain is quite wide open and we need an ecumenical appreciation of the tools in the toolkit. One major gap, in fact, is evident in the continuing dearth of data collected under comparable conditions. (Myers, 2010, p. 21)

Such experimentation is a necessity rather than a virtuous exercise. ‘Whether or not Africa’s prospering ‘cheetah’ nations of the 2000’s will continue to match optimists’ expectations of interconnected economic growth and improved governance over the coming years as they have over the past decade, there is little question that urban centers will be a moving target for urban analysts, who will seek to keep pace through the rapid and experimental adoption of new methodological and analytical frameworks’ (Brennan, 2013, p. 38). As also Edgar Pieterse (2014) notes in his *Epistemological Practices of Southern Urbanism*, contemporary researchers have little choice but to rely on what is available in spite of the profound imprecision that characterize data sets on urbanization in Africa. It is evident that there is a dearth of data and knowledge about both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of cities in much of Africa (Myers, 2010).

**Previous page**

Rene Magritte, La Clairvoyance, 1936.  
Source: ReneMagritte.org

This can be connected to the long-term erosion and under-investment in higher education institutions in the postcolonial era, but also to the institutional reforms that African universities have been subjected to, paralleling neoliberal reforms in the global North, even though to begin with the foundation of these universities were already precarious and under-funded (Pieterse, 2014). It can also be tied to the larger epistemic crises that Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) have mapped in their investigation into the modes of ‘writing Africa into the world’ (Ibid.). Finally, the lack of thick and multivalent knowledges about African cities can be referenced to the forms of rule that have predominated, especially since the 1980’s (Chabal 2009). The fact that most African universities are then also embedded in multiple asymmetric relationships with Northern universities to serve as extensions for field work and data collection further complicates the picture (Pieterse, 2014).

The main narratives in contemporary research on African cities have been polarizing. In scientific literature, the tension is clear between “those who would like to foreground ‘the emergency’ versus those who are arguing for a more grounded form of theorization that implies a politics of openness, multiple possibilities, rhizomatic power, contestation, resignification” (Pieterse, 2014, p. 4). Pieterse identifies a necessity to move beyond Mike Davis’s suggestion of a ‘permanent state of emergency’ and instead refer to the postcolonial theorization opened up by authors such as Filip de Boeck, Mamadou Diouf, Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall, AbdouMaliq Simone and many others, which “remind us of the imperative to take care to know what is going on before proceeding to make assumptions about how people understand, experience, navigate, transcend, resist, admit, or reinterpret the psychosocial experiences that are effected by tough material conditions” (Pieterse, 2014, p. 4).

The methodological implication of this work is a reaffirmation of painstaking, careful and reflexive ethnographic research into the mundane and the absurd, often tied together invisibly by the spectral (De Boeck & Plissart, 2014). It represents a research practice that can resist the demands for definite conclusions and solutions, resist the temptation for generalized abstraction about ‘the poors’ or the subalterns, and rather settle for a careful elucidation of the many folds and intimacies regarding processes of subjectification. (Ibid.)

The goal then becomes to produce knowledge that can “enable key urban actors to act with greater clarity of intent and self-awareness about the consequences of their actions” (Pieterse, 2014, p. 4). In a shift from theory-driven and Western-centered studies, forms and narratives from the world of practice have acquire an increasingly important role in the urban studies literature about the cities in the South, and more specifically, African cities, which have always constituted a somehow problematic field of research in themselves. Even if the quests to find common trends among ‘African cities’ are still very much en vogue, the methodologies of these studies have changed considerably with time.

Conventional methods of ethnography – and by extension, methods of social science, history, linguistics, et cetera – cannot cope with incongruity, because they cannot anticipate the heterogeneity and unconventional nature of African cities, both past and present. (Brennan, 2013, p. 38)

The difference between Anthony O’Connor’s *The African City* (1983) and Jerome Chenal’s *The West African City: Urban Space and Models of Urban Planning* (2014) is striking. The attempt to identify a common model among African cities is common to both authors. Nonetheless, while O’Connor, who ended up identifying six variations on the theme, provided just a handful of diagrams and schemes to illustrate his research, Chenal’s heavily relied on visual media, utilizing photographic surveys to study the city’s urban form and dynamics and integrated them with other first-hand documents (as for example excerpts from the local press) as sources. Both authors identified some common trends among African or as in Chenal’s case, West African (francophone) cities, but the methodologies that they used varied considerably.

Ever since the 1950’s architects and urban planners have been studying the ‘tropical city.’ Publications such as Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew’s *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone* (1956) and Udo Kultermann’s *Neues Bauen in Afrika* (1963)<sup>1</sup> would not only tell, but also show, their approach towards architecture and urban design in these contexts. Lately, innovative – and often experimental – research methods, such as MIT’s Community Innovation Lab *Sensing the City Through Sound*

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1 See also Tostões, A., (2013). Docomomo Journal 48: Modern Africa, Tropical Architecture | Editorial: Ten Years After, the Continent oh Hope and Modern Heritage. A Tribute to Udo Kultermann.

(2015) or architect David Adjaye's 'anti-iconic' photography (2011) have attempted to expand on the variety of methodologies utilized to describe the African city.

Contemporary Urban studies about African cities are undergoing a transition from a strictly theory-driven approach to a more problem-driven one, and researchers have taken on increasingly greater degrees of experimentation with their methodologies. Publications such as Manuel Herz's *African Modernism - Architecture of Independence* (2015), Marc Angélil and Charlotte Malterre-Barthes' *Housing Cairo: The Informal Response* (2016), and Jerome Chenal's *The West African City: Urban Space and Models of Urban Planning* (2014) represent but the last instances in this new current.

Similarly, narratives from practices that contribute to the urban development of African cities have started gaining traction among scholars and in academic research. The basic tools of the Real Estate development world (both from the public and the private side) have been increasingly utilized to support theoretical reflections and ground them into specific urban contexts. This is the case for Garth Myers' *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice* (2011) and AbdouMalik Simone's *For the City Yet to Come: Changing Life in Four Cities* (2004), in which they both use first-hand accounts of everyday practices to elaborate their theories about specific African urban contexts.

This did not happen overnight, as in time, a number of publications have contributed to such shift. Historical studies, such as Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's *The History of African Cities South of the Sahara*, and Bill Freund's *The African City: a History*, attempted to paint a univocal and comprehensive picture of the continent's urban landscape, despite acknowledging its variety and complexity, therefore avoiding to fall in O'Connor's possibly overly generalist approach (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2005; Freund, 2007). Previously, Carole Rakodi's *The Urban Challenge in Africa* (1997) had offered a more 'polyphonic' perspective, expressing the continent's urban heterogeneity through similarly heterogeneous points of view from different authors writing about particular urban issues. This type of publication set a common trend for the following years, during which similar collections of essays about the African urban condition were published, like *Cities in Contemporary Africa* by Martin Murray and Garth Myers (2006). Other authors choose instead to zoom further out, inquiring about general and theoretical issues (which often

spanned across the whole continent), while somehow losing the sense of the reality of the specific urban contexts that they were addressing. This is the case for *Africa's Urban Revolution* by Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse, which declared its own goal as simply 'asserting the importance of African cities' (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014, p. 2). Despite the almost symmetrically opposite approaches, as the authors themselves later admitted, both parties were failing at conveying a clear message about the object of their study (the African city) and its condition. This also likely depended by the problematic nature of the object of study itself<sup>2</sup>. Both Myers and Pieterse acknowledged this issue in following publications, in their call for a more phronetic and context-sensitive approach (Myers, 2011, p. 14; Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 26,28). In this slow but necessary process, the African city was shifting from a blurry distant object judged through Western eyes, to an 'important loci of global processes or generators of urban stories worth telling and worth learning from' (Myers, 2011, p. 6). Rem Koolhaas and the Harvard Project on the City (Haak, 2005) published the famous Lagos Wide & Close DVD in 2005 and ever since then, experimentation has continued. In 2015, the MIT Community Innovation Lab started a series of studies based on listening to the city's sounds which span from Accra (African Urbanism Blog, 2015) to Mexico City and architect David Adjaye has published a monograph about African City which relies almost exclusively on visual media in the forms of photographs taken from cars to illustrate (at least one side) of the urban reality of the continent's cities (Adjaye, 2011; Adjaye & Allison, 2011). The road to this type of research was paved by thanks to the works of authors such as the aforementioned AbdouMalik Simone (2004), but also Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004), Richard Grant (2009), Filip De Boeck and Marie-Françoise Plissart (2014), and Ato Quayson (2014) whom began to explore the African city with different theoretical and more inductive approaches. Starting from their deep knowledge and understanding of a number of different places, they painted a different picture of the African city. Market intelligence reports that are used to inform potential investors, stakeholders and government officials about the current situation and potential perspectives of contemporary markets already produce documents that link localized narratives to broader market trends. This thesis aims to bridge the gap between academic theory and professional practice by utilizing

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2 For more about the concept of *African cities* see chapter 2.1.3.

tools from these apparently disconnected worlds, integrating the narratives from the practice with the theoretical discourse. This thesis aims to continue in this direction, utilizing visual media and narratives from the practices of urban development as an integral part of the research, while integrating them with theory to investigate what is unique about them and what instead can be reconnected to broader – possibly global – urban trends.

### **1.1.2. Phronetic Planning Research**

Foucault says that discourse is not life; regular, daily practice is life. This could be the motto for phronetic planning research. (Flyvbjerg, 2004, pp. 16–17)

Phronesis concerns the analysis of values – ‘things that are good or bad for man,’ in Aristotle’s ancient formulation – as a point of departure for planned action. Phronesis is that intellectual activity most relevant to praxis. It focuses on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases. Phronesis requires an interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires deliberation, judgment, and choice[...]More than anything else, phronesis requires experience. (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 7)

This thesis adopts a phronetic approach that, as elaborated by Bent Flyvbjerg, is based on the idea that “natural sciences are better at testing hypotheses to demonstrate abstract principles and law-like relationships, while social sciences are better at producing situated knowledge about how to understand and act in contextualized settings, based on deliberation about specific sets of values and interests” (Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012, p. 2). While natural sciences excel at conducting decontextualized experiments to understand abstract and generalizable law-like relationships, social sciences can conduct contextualized studies involving field research that produces specific knowledge about the values and interests that drive human relationships and their actions.

Social sciences can distinctively produce the kind of knowledge that grows out of intimate familiarity with practice in contextualized settings. These are local knowledges, even tacit knowledges and skills, that cannot be taught a priori but that grow from the bottom up, emerging out of practice. Add a sense of praxis, seeking the ability to push for change, leaven it with an appreciation of the in-eliminable

presence of power, and this phronetic social science can help people involved in ongoing political struggle question the relationships of knowledge and power and thereby work to produce change. (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012, p. 2)

In his *Making Social Sciences Matter* (2001), Flyvbjerg explains how phronesis is what the social sciences have to offer that the natural sciences cannot, with their emphasis on epistémé and techné. This Aristotelian tripartite distinction is critical in order to highlight the comparative advantage of social science. Phronesis is, in Aristotle's definition, "the practical wisdom that comes from an intimate familiarity with the contingencies and uncertainties of any particular social practice". Epistémé, however, is abstract and universal knowledge; and techné is the expertise associated with practicing a particular craft. Social sciences, for Flyvbjerg, are better situated to conduct research that can inform, and thereby enhance, phronesis, and there are four inter-related reasons for promoting phronetic social science:

- 1) Given the dynamic nature of human interaction in the social world, social inquiry is best practiced when it does not seek general laws of action that can be used to predict courses of action, but instead offer a critical assessment of values, norms and structures of power and dominance. Social inquiry is better when it is linked to questions of the good life, that is, to questions of what we ought to do.
- 2) While the social world is dynamic, social research is best seen as dialogical. Social inquiry is not a species of theoretical reason but of practical reason. Practical reason stays within a horizon of involvements in social life. For Flyvbjerg, this entails a context-dependent view of social inquiry that rests on the capacity for judgment. Understanding can never be grasped analytically; it has a holistic character. Understanding also has intrinsic subjective elements requiring researchers to forgo a disinterested position of detachment and enter into dialogue with those they study.
- 3) As the study of dynamic social life, dialogical social inquiry is best practiced when we give up traditional notions of objectivity and truth and put aside the fact-value distinction. Instead, we should emphasize a contextual notion of truth that is pluralistic and culture-bound, further necessitating involvement with those we study.

4) Dialogical social inquiry into a dynamic and changing social world provides a basis for emphasizing that interpretation is itself a practice of power, one that if conducted publicly and in ways that engage the public can also challenge power and inform efforts to promote social change. (Schram, 2012, pp. 18–19).

The goal of phronetic social science is to produce research that has relevance to decisions about what can and should be done, and how to do it. It differs from either philosophical or scientific knowledge (epistémé) and from technical knowledge or know-how (techné) since it is practice-focused (not being only about what is true, but also about what it would be good to do in given circumstances) and in that it is concerned with evaluating and prescribing goals as well as with selecting means.

Whereas episteme resembles our ideal modern scientific project, techné and phronesis denote two alternative roles of intellectual work. Techné can be translated into English as ‘art’ in the sense of ‘craft;’ a craftsperson is also an artisan. For Aristotle, both techné and phronesis are connected with the concept of truth, as is epistémé [...] techné is thus craft and art, and as an activity, it is concrete, variable, and context-dependent. The objective of techné is application of technical knowledge and skills according to a pragmatic instrumental rationality [...] Planning research practiced as techne would be a type of consulting aimed at arriving at better planning by means of instrumental rationality, where ‘better’ is defined in terms of the values and goals of those who employ the consultants, sometimes in negotiation with the latter. Whereas epistémé concerns theoretical know why and techné denotes technical know-how, phronesis emphasizes practical knowledge and practical ethics. (2004, pp. 5–6)

Phronetic social science rejects the fact-value distinction prevalent in mainstream social science moreover, focuses its efforts on answering four critical questions related to enhancing practice wisdom:

- 1) Where are we going?
- 2) Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?
- 3) Is it desirable?
- 4) What should be done?



As these questions indicate, phronetic social science's focus is on producing research that helps make a difference in people's lives by focusing on what it would take to act upon the issues that matter to them most. Nonetheless, phronetic social science does not privilege collaboration with the people being studied as much as producing knowledge that improves the ability of those people to make informed decisions about the issues that they are facing (regardless of whether that research is done in collaboration with them or not). Phronetic social science is ultimately about producing knowledge that can challenge power not in theory but in ways that inform real efforts to produce change. It combines an Aristotelian concern for *phronesis* with a Marxist concern for *praxis*.

Arthur W. Frank interprets *phronesis* as "people's practical wisdom in dealing with both routine decisions and unexpected contingencies" (Frank, 2012, p. 48). This practical wisdom has three aspects: it is first, content, second, a quality of persons and third, a form of action. As content, *phronesis* is a resource – a stock of experiential knowledge. As a quality of persons, it is what enables acquisition and appropriate use of that knowledge – a capacity. As action, *phronesis* necessarily involves doing something – a practice in which experiential knowledge is both used and gained. Phronetic planning research explores current practices and historic circumstances to find solutions to practical problems. The job of the researcher is to identify and deliberate about such problems, possibilities, and the risks that they imply, with the ultimate objective to outline how things could be done differently, "all in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions or even a single version of what the questions are" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 25). The goal of this approach is to have less theory and more debate about and development of the craft of specific, contextualized research about practices and the power relations, which define such practices.

Michel Foucault emphasizes a point of departure for social and political research in what he calls "the little question . . . flat and empirical, the question of 'How?' Foucault stresses that our understanding will suffer if we do not start our analyses with this question, because we will not understand the dynamics of practice" (1984, p. 76). Therefore, phronetic planning researchers focus on the dynamic question, 'How?' in addition to 'Why?' "The phronetic researcher is concerned with both understanding and explaining. He investigates and interprets the outcomes of practice in relation to its processes" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 20).

Phronetic planning researchers focus on practical activity and practical knowledge in everyday situations in planning. It may mean, but is certainly not limited to, a focus on known sociological, ethnographic, and historical phenomena like ‘everyday life’ and ‘everyday people,’ with their focus on the so-called ‘common.’ What it always means, however, is a focus on the actual daily practices – common or highly specialized or rarefied – which constitute a given field of interest, regardless of whether these practices constitute the UNDP headquarters, a local planning office, a particular plan or project, a grassroots organization, a neighborhood, or the decisions of an architectural review board. (2004, pp. 16–17)

This practice-turn is also evident from Patricia Clarke Annez and Johannes Lynn’s analysis of contemporary urbanization research issues (Annez & Linn, 2010), in which they specifically point out how, among the authors analyzed:

- All authors focused their recommendations on issues of relevance to the practitioners’ audience, rather than to an academic audience. This is important, since there is a great gap between academic research and practical application in the area of urban development. As a result, many of the key findings of academic research have not found their way into practical application (e.g., the market-oriented regulation of land and housing markets, the principle of subsidiarity, etc.).
- All authors stressed the need to focus on specific country and city contexts and on the specifics of the interventions, rather than pursuing general theories and testing them against cross-country data sets.

The underlying idea is that practical rationality, like judgment, is best understood through the exposition to case studies – whether experienced or narrated. The significance of this point can hardly be overstated, which is why Rorty, in responding to Max Weber’s thesis regarding the modern ‘disenchantment of the world,’ invokes John Dewey to say: “the way to re-enchant the world . . . is to stick to the concrete” (1985, p. 173).

The development of social research is inhibited by the fact that researchers tend to work with problems in which the answer to the question: 'If you are wrong about this, who will notice?' is all too often: 'Nobody.' Bailey calls the outcome of such research "so what" results.' Phronetic planning researchers seek to transcend this problem of relevance by anchoring their research in the context studied. (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 14)

The question then becomes not 'which method?' but 'what matters?' Phronetic social science has its own ontological and epistemological commitments that are based on an understanding of the particular nature of the social sciences' subject. Therefore, phronetic research is not organized around specific methods of data collection. It is open to relying on different methods of data collection in order to best promote change regarding the issues that are being studied. "Depending on how they are conducted, mixed-methods projects are entirely consistent with phronetic social science. In this respect, phronetic social science provides an opportunity to move beyond the debates between positivists and interpretivists about how to organize social science in terms of method" (Schram, 2012, p. 20). The debate between positivists, who side for emulating the natural sciences, and interpretivists, who instead choose to opt to approach the study of politics with more humanistic forms of inquiry has been going on for many years. The two competing epistemologies, the positivist and the interpretivist have defined distinctive methodologies which differentiate themselves through the use of different logics of inquiry, methods of data collection and quantitative versus qualitative data. Such debates have recently further complicated, thanks to the appearance of others who do not situate their investigations in neither of those camps. A growing number of scholars in fact refuse to accept that they must limit their research to either a positivist or interpretivist methodology. Mixed-methods researchers have been joined by others who stress the importance of 'problem-driven' over 'theory-driven' research (Shapiro, 2005). These researchers focus on real-world problems and use many different methods and forms of data collection. Schram points out how this situation reminds him of the *Methodenstreit* that wracked the fledgling social sciences in Europe during the late nineteenth century and the contention of relevance versus rigor. He also cites Max Weber, who came to be a major influence in both what today are the positivist and interpretivist factions. In his 1904 essay on 'The

‘Objectivity’ of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy’ Weber argued, in a response to the failure of the Verein [für Sozialpolitik] and the ideological and methodological disputes that had characterized its history stressing the commitment of the journal to the scientific pursuit of ‘the facts of social life,’ but also its concerns with ‘social policy’ and ‘the training of judgment in respect of practical problems arising from these social circumstances’. Weber emphasized various ways in which social scientific knowledge could constrain and direct policy decisions as well as the extent to which scientific investigation necessarily proceeded from the perspective of value-laden premises. “The authority of social science nevertheless depended, he argued, on acceptance of the autonomy of empirical claims and on the professional status and independence of those who made such claims” (Gunnell, 2006, p. 481). As Schram notes, in this famous 1904 essay, Weber was simultaneously doing what he would often do, which is to take two sides of the argument at once: “he was for social science being practiced in an objectively scrupulous way that enable it to inform decisions regarding the most pressing public issues” (Schram, 2012, pp. 21–2).

For years, both positivists, who strove to make social science more like a natural science, and interpretivists, who worked to make it more like the interpretive investigations of the humanities, would draw upon Weber, each in their own selective ways, to suggest the direction for social science. The debates that preoccupied Weber and his colleagues were framed in terms of whether social science ought to be more about *erklären* (explanation) or *verstehen* (understanding). The interpretive approaches emphasize that it is more important to try to arrive at understanding how the social world is subjectively experienced and interpreted by people than it is to provide an explanation of what caused social phenomena to happen. (Schram, 2012, p. 22)

The ‘interpretive turn’ had many sources, including Clifford Geertz, who saw interpretive approaches as a fundamental point of departure to understand whatever was being studied. Geertz resisted the idea that researchers had to choose either an interpretive or a positivist approach as a distinct procedure of inquiry. Nonetheless, over time, as Schram points out, “the main thrust of the interpretive turn has been to insist that interpretive social science implied a distinct logic of inquiry that prevented mixing methodologies. Positivism and interpretivism became

the oil and water of social science research” (Ibid.). Researchers were increasingly discouraged from mixing the methodologies, on the ground that positivism and interpretivism implied separate logics of inquiry that could not be combined in the same analysis. This has contributed to a fracturing in the social sciences where different researchers employing different approaches talk to each other less and less (Almond, 1990).

Phronetic research attempts instead to bridge this gap and by not depending on the adoption of a particular methodology (as both quantitative or qualitative data and methods are equally valid), but rather focusing on its goal, which is to produce research that can help develop phronesis by increasing understanding and effecting change in specific contexts. The phronetic approach does not imply the use of specific methodologies that are fitted to the scale and the characteristics of the object of analysis case by case. It relies on the analysis of practice and of the mechanisms of power that determine the current status-quo. Furthermore, it implies the analysis of values as a point of departure for action, ultimately an evaluation of the situation in question and a judgment based on such analysis. This approach has been encouraged by African scholars like Edgar Pieterse, which have lamented a “detachment between theory and practice in contemporary cities” (Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 26). As Flyvbjerg explains, “a central task of phronetic planning research is to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in planning and with what consequences to whom, and to suggest how relations of power and values could be changed to work with other consequences” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 1). Flyvbjerg puts the emphasis not on particular research methods or types of data, but on “producing research that can help develop phronesis by increasing understanding and effecting change in specific contexts rather than questing after the ghost of an abstract knowledge of law-like processes” (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012, p. 2).

As Schram notes, mixed-methods research fits nicely with the call for problem-driven research, where a researcher starts with a specific problem in the world of politics and then employs different theoretical approaches to study it as best he or she can. He also argues that such upsurge in mixed-methods, problem-driven research might then prove to be better able to deliver on the founding promise of the social sciences to connect science and democracy, leading to the improvement of both, not just in theory but in practice as well (Schram, 2012).

Given its critique of the quest for transcontextual and cumulative empirical knowledge that validates social scientific truths, phronetic social science understands that social science is best equipped to offer contextualized knowledge appropriate to particular settings and focused on specific problems. The case study becomes not just an acceptable alternative, but central to conducting phronetic research further, phronetic social science stays true to its principles and allows for a diversity of data-collection methods to help produce relevant contextualized knowledge. Case studies need not be limited to ethnography. Phronetic social science understands that the main issue is not method, but whether the research is designed consciously to answer its four questions [...] Phronetic social science, in fact, explicitly calls for answering these questions in a way that is relevant to the particular situation in which the people being studied find themselves. Therefore, the key questions need to be answered in a contextually sensitive fashion. Case studies, using whatever methods help them address the issue being studied, are no longer a marginal form of social science research.

Given the foregoing, it could be that the future includes a more optimistic assessment of the idea of social science. It may be that the social sciences are more amenable to putting aside debates about method focus on what matters most. From problem-driven research to phronetic social science, social science may be now more open to putting aside its own science wars in favour of centring research on addressing critical social issues using whatever set of diverse methods of data collection that best help address those issues. (Schram, 2012, pp. 24–25)

Flyvbjerg argues that it is impossible to be truly problem driven and at the same time committed to a certain method. Thus, the primary issue for phronetic planning research is to arrive at research that effectively answers the four value-rational questions as a basis for action. “The method employed to provide such answers is of secondary importance, in the sense that the method will be decided by the specific research problems at hand” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, pp. 10–11) .

Phronetic planning researchers begin their work by phenomenologically asking ‘little questions’ and focusing on what Geertz calls ‘thick description’(Geertz, 1973, p. 6). This procedure may often seem tedious and trivial. Ni-

etzsche and Foucault emphasize that it requires ‘patience and a knowledge of details,’ and it depends on a ‘vast accumulation of source material.’ Geertz explicates the dilemma involved in skipping minutiae. The problem with an approach that extracts the general from the particular and then sets the particular aside as detail, illustration, background, or qualification, is, as Geertz says, that it leaves us helpless in the face of the very difference we need to explore; it does indeed simplify matters. (2004, p. 16)

The results of phronetic planning research are fed back into the power dynamics that gave rise to the research in the first place. The goal is to contribute to change relations of power, when needed.

Phronetic research is dialogical in the sense that it incorporates, and, if successful, is itself incorporated into, a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority. The goal of phronetic planning research is to produce input to the ongoing dialogue and praxis in relation to planning, which is set in a context of power, rather than to generate ultimate, unequivocally verified knowledge about the nature of planning. (2004, pp. 22–23)

The result of phronetic planning research is a pragmatic interpretation of the practices. Yet, it is just an interpretation, the expression of one of the many possible points of view over the question. As Flyvbjerg notes, “objectivity in phronetic planning research is [...] the employment of a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 23). The interpretation does not require the researcher to agree with the actors’ everyday understanding; nor does it require the discovery of some deep, inner meaning of the practices. “Phronetic planning research is interpretive, but it is neither everyday nor deep hermeneutics. Phronetic planning research is also not about, nor does it try to develop, theory or universal method. Thus, phronetic planning research is an analytical project, but not a theoretical or methodological one” (2004, pp. 24–25):

Phronetic planning researchers oppose the view that any one among a number of interpretations lacks value because it is ‘merely’ an interpretation [...] The key point is the establishment of a better option, where ‘better’ is defined in the customary manner as based on better sets of validity claims, accepted or rejected by the community of schol-

ars. If a new interpretation appears to better explain a given phenomenon, that new interpretation will replace the old one--until it, too, is replaced by a new and yet better interpretation. This is typically a continuing process, not one that terminates with 'the right answer.' Such is the procedure that a community of planning researchers would follow in working together to put certain interpretations of planning ahead of others. The procedure by which validity is determined in phronetic research is therefore no different from how this is done in other social science research. The procedure does not so much describe an interpretive or relativistic approach. Rather, it sets forth the basic ground rules for any inquiry into human affairs, inasmuch as social science and philosophy have not yet identified criteria by which an ultimate interpretation and a final grounding of values and facts can be made. (Flyvbjerg, 2004, pp. 12–13)

Naturally, embracing the non-paradigmatic nature of social science means not only giving up the idea that the social sciences can be unified around a particular method. It also means to give up the idea that the social sciences produce generalizable scientific truths that are affirmed by empirical research. Phronetic social science recognizes that social scientific knowledge is neither trans-contextual nor cumulative. This involves a repudiation of the main tenets of the positivist model of social science such as:

- 1) Social science exists to help promote the understanding of the truth about social relations in general;
- 2) Social science research contributes to this quest by adding to the accumulation of an expanding base of objective knowledge about social relations;
- 3) The growth of this knowledge base is contingent upon the building of theory that offers explanations of social relations;
- 4) The building of theory is dependent on the development of universal generalizations regarding the behavior of social actors;
- 5) The development of a growing body of generalizations occurs by testing falsifiable, causal hypotheses that demonstrate their success in making predictions;



6) The accumulation of a growing body of predictions about social relations comes from the study of variables in samples involving large numbers of cases; and

(7) This growing body of objective, causal knowledge can be put at the service of society.

[The positivist model of social science] assumes that the study of a single case is 'unscientific', provides no basis for generalizing, does not build theory, cannot contribute to the growth of political knowledge and, as a result, is not even to be considered for publication in the leading journals and is to be discouraged as a legitimate doctoral dissertation project. (Schram, 2012, p. 23)

Yet, from the perspective of phronetic social science, this paradigm includes much valuable research. This research adopts this approach and attempts to prove its effectiveness through the study of one specific case studies, and the analysis of the practices of few selected actors or 'agents' within this context.

Practice theory is not news in the field of social sciences. 'Anthropology, sociology, and related subfields of history have increasingly taken 'practices' as their primary object of study in the last several decades of the twentieth century. Applications of the practice idiom extend from the most mundane aspects of everyday life to highly structured activities in institutional settings' (Rouse, 2007, p. 1). Nevertheless, up until today, the concept of practice in theory is still subject of ample debate. In his *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001), Theodore Schatzki illustrates some of the main trends within the debate:

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hubert Dreyfus, and Charles Taylor contend that practices at once underlie subjects and objects, highlight nonpropositional knowledge, and illuminate the conditions of intelligibility. For their social theoretical brethren Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and the ethnomethodologists, talk of practices bespeaks such desires as those to free activity from the determining grasp of objectified social structures and systems, to question individual actions and their status as the building-blocks of social phenomena, and to transcend rigid action-structure oppositions. For cultural theorists Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, among others, to speak of practices is to depict language as discursive activity in opposition to structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist conceptions of

it as structure, system, or abstract discourse. And among, finally, the purposes animating the practice theoretical study of science and technology are the development of concepts of science as activity as opposed to representation and the reconsideration of humanist dichotomies between human and nonhuman entities.

Schatzki also argues that, “moving the above disciplines in such directions, practice theorists are making decisive contributions to contemporary understandings of diverse issues. These include the philosophical and social scientific significance of human activity; the nature of subjectivity, embodiment, rationality, meaning, and normativity; the character of language, science, and power; and the organization, reproduction, and transformation of social life. In making these contributions, practice approaches thereby oppose numerous current and recent paths of thinking, including intellectualism, representationalism, individualisms, structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many strains of humanism and poststructuralism” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 10). As he concludes, given this multiplicity of impulses, issues, and oppositions, it is not surprising that there is no unified practice approach. Most thinkers who theorize practices conceive of them simply as arrays of activity. Their conceptions of activity and what connects these activities vary, with some theorists defining practices as the skills, or tacit knowledges and presuppositions, that underpin such activities (Dreyfus, 1990; Turner, 1994). Nonetheless, while most philosophers and the traditional social science thinkers identify the activities involved as those of persons (practices are arrays of human activity), a significant ‘post-humanist’ minority centered in science and technology studies argues that the activities bound into practices should also include those of nonhumans such as machines and the objects of scientific investigation. Ultimately, Schatzki concludes that “most practice theorists would agree that activity is embodied and that nexuses of practices are mediated by artifacts, hybrids, and natural objects, disagreements reign about the nature of embodiment, the pertinence of thematizing it when analyzing practices, the sorts of entities that mediate activity, and whether these entities are relevant to practices as more than mere intermediaries among humans” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 11). The debate is far from over. As Rouse notes, the recurrent difficulty of clearly distinguishing socially instituted norms of correct performance from instrumental norms

of success and failure calls for a conception of ‘practice’ that cuts across any boundary between normative social interaction and its causal-environmental nexus (Rouse, 2007). In that sense, the concept of phronesis could provide valuable through its integration within more established frameworks of practice theory, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s and his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), which over the years has been used as theoretical framework in a number of fields and still provided valuable reference in defining the theoretical framework of this research.

In his definition of this ‘grand theory,’<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu interpreted the society in terms of domination and relative strength that, as he argues, is mainly the result of unequal allocation of resources within the society. One of Bourdieu’s most important and criticized contributions is the reconciliation of the dualism of structure vs. agency, structuralism vs. constructivism, determinism vs. freedom or macro vs. micro (Bourdieu, 1972). In his theory, social structures such as international markets are used to highlight the patterns of social life that are not reducible to individuals and that are durable enough to withstand individual influence. Structures act as rules, determining and conditioning individuals’ thoughts and behaviors. In a pure structuralist perspective, people would ‘behave’ as robots programmed to act in accordance with the structured patterns. On the other hand, the voluntarism (or agency) perspective rather suggests that individuals are completely free in their choices and always have a number of alternatives. In his Theory of Practice, Bourdieu attempts to overcome these dualities. “He explains strategy or practice by the complex interplay of his main concepts, namely field, habitus and capital” (Walther, 2014, p. 1). The interplay of these elements leads to strategy or practice.<sup>4</sup>

$$[(\text{habitus} \times \text{capital}) + \text{field}] = \text{practice}$$

Bourdieu understands practice as the result of social structures on a particular field (structure; macro) where certain rules apply and of one’s habitus (agency; micro), i.e. the embodied history that is manifested in our system of thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving. The habitus assures the collective belief in the rules of the social game (*illusio*) and

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3 An abstract and normative theory of human nature and conduct that is generic in nature and that can be applied to different circumstances and areas of research (Skinner, 1985, p. 1).

4 i.e. The unconscious behavior acting in conformity with our interests that aims at achieving our objectives by investing capital and fighting for capital.

that actors act in accordance with their position on the field (doxa), which depends on their relative amount and structure of economic, cultural (and social) capital.

Through the introduction of the concept of ‘social fields’, Bourdieu recognized the importance of local specificities. A social field is a ‘locus of struggles’ that represents a network of positions (Bourdieu, 1972). In his interpretation, fields are defined as places of power relations where practices are not arbitrary and all interactions are anchored in specific, autonomous<sup>5</sup>, social fields, which represent the playground where determinate rules<sup>6</sup> apply.

Agents need to be endowed with a specific quantity and structure of resources they can put at stake in order to obtain the right to enter a social field. Each field values particular sorts of resources that Bourdieu defined as capital, which can be namely economic, cultural, social or symbolic. Capital represents both the agent’s the right to enter a social field, the agent’s position on the field or social space in general<sup>7</sup>.

With habitus, Bourdieu understands the “ensemble of schemata of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking and acting that structures all expressive, verbal, and practical manifestations and utterances of a person” (Krais, 1993, p. 169). Similarly to the grammar in the language, this must not be mistaken for the common notion of habit as a mechanical adoption of a previously determined program<sup>8</sup>. Habitus is durable but evolving and is continually adjusted to the current context and reinforced by experience.

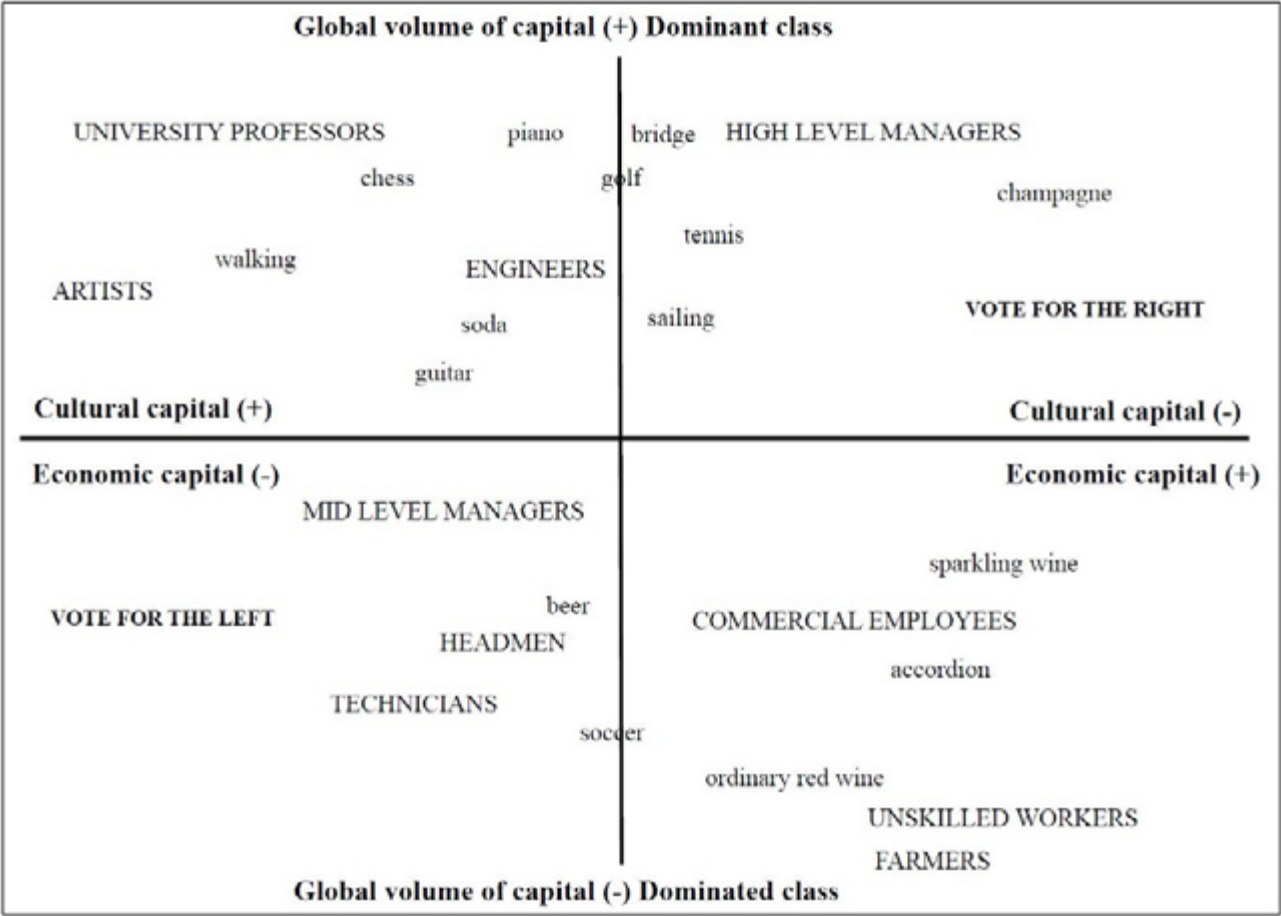
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5 The respective rules and conditions on a social field have to be found out by empirical research. Therefore, Bourdieu argues that due to their unique rules, fields are autonomous. However, he also qualifies that the autonomy is only relative as fields are embedded in a social space. For instance, the intellectual field may also be influenced by the politic, the economy or religion.

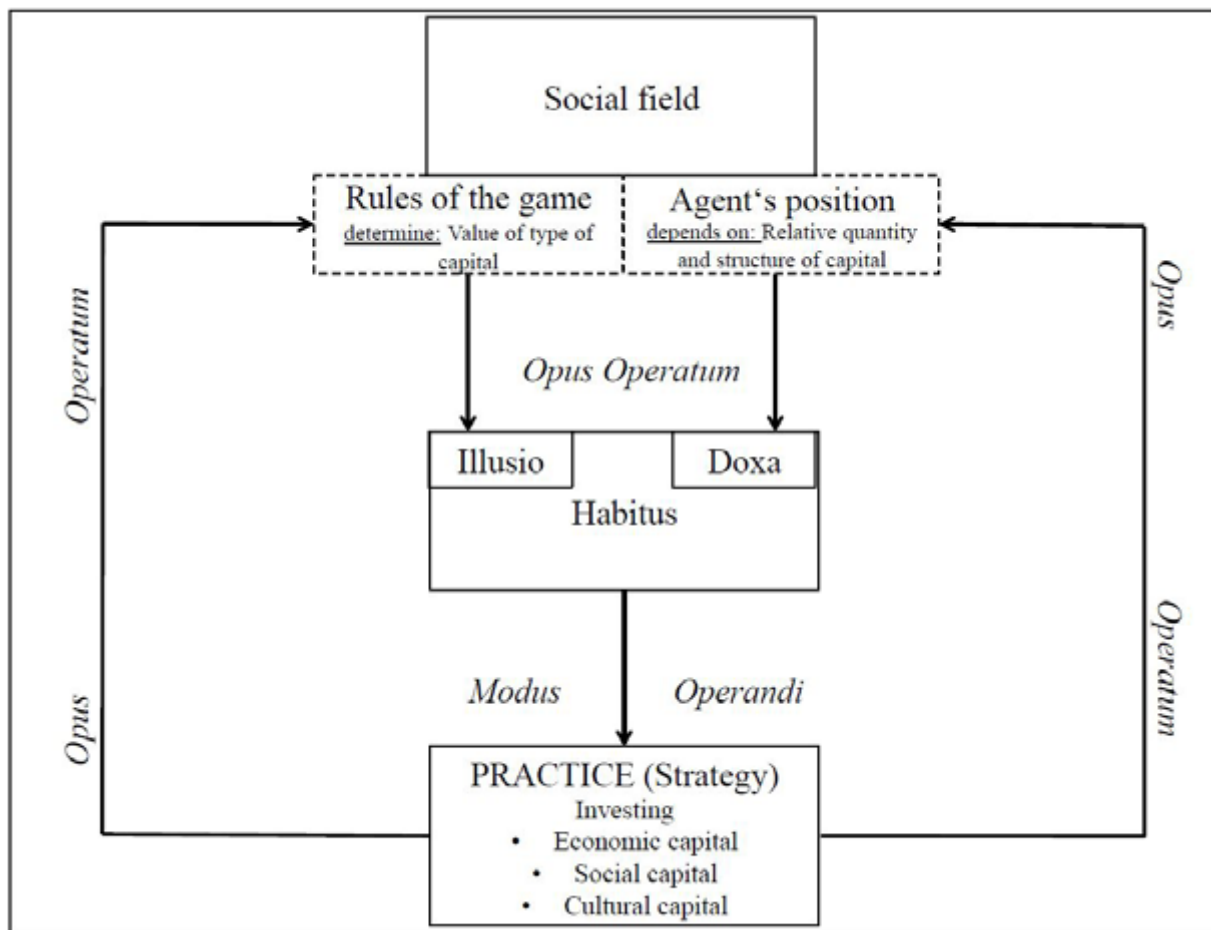
6 Bourdieu understands these social fields as universe or microcosm in which the agents and institutions are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with field-specific rules, which is why the field represents the more structural part of Bourdieu’s theory. Rules are not formalized but rather tacit in nature and need to be internalized by the agents in order to demonstrate appropriate practices and strategies. The internalization of the field-specific rules enables the agent to anticipate future tendencies and opportunities. There is no global rule that applies to all fields (Walther, 2014).

7 Bourdieu insists on the fact that positions on social fields are relative. They are determined by the volume and structure of the agent’s capital portfolio and compared to that of other agents on the same field, in particular in terms of economic and cultural capital.

8 As Walther notes, ‘Bourdieu rather emphasizes the active role of the social agent in the construction of the social reality’ (Walther, 2014, p. 13).



Source: Walther, M., 2014. P12.



Source: Walther, M., 2014. P16.

Habitus is the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations. Therefore, the habitus is said to guide our strategy (stratégie), i.e. the unconscious practice (pratique) that aims at achieving our objectives by investing the appropriate types and amounts of capitals on a social field[...] In a nutshell, the interplay between habitus and field can be understood as a circle in a sense of a dialectical relationship between objective structures and subjective dispositions within which objective structures are confirmed and reproduced. Thereby, Bourdieu means that habitus is both ‘opus operatum’ and ‘modus operandi’, i.e. both the result of practices and modes of practices. (Walther, 2014, p. 14)

Within this picture, agents are not puppets whose actions are fully manipulated by external field forces. They are “bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy on the field [...] they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 108). As a result, Bourdieu suggests that agents have a certain degree of liberty in their choice of strategies and practices or, in other words, they have a certain degree of agency in their fight for relative positions on the social field. However, agents always act intentionally without intentions in accordance with the rules of the game and their relative position on the field (structure). The issues surrounding the role, and the very definition of ‘field’ and ‘agents’ assume a particularly complex and problematic meaning when applied to the African context, given the social and political depth and articulation that the local urban contexts and networks of actors constitute.

The challenges for urban studies no longer lie solely on their theoretical attention to the marginalized informal, invisible, spectral, *necropolitan* or ordinary settings across the cities of the continent – important as they may be. I argue that they lie equally in practice. (Myers, 2011, p. 14)

International scholars are increasingly utilizing examples from African cities to address global urban issues. As Okui Enwezor writes in *Under Siege, Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, “there is a need for an extensive relocation of discourses of globalism and culture to the specificity of sites within which particular questions and issues are inscribed [...] our hope is to dramatize and demonstrate

on an immediate level the interdependence of the global paradigm, by revealing how local specificities create new orientations in the global discourse” (Enwezor, 2002, p. 4). A similar approach has been adopted by scholars such as Richard Grant, Mamadou Diouf, Garth Myers and AbdouMaliq Simone, which through their research, have paved the way for this type of phronetic, practice-approach (Diouf, 2003; Grant, 2009; Myers, 2011; Simone, 2004). Both Myers and Simone emphasize the importance of practice, using direct citations from their interviews to illustrate the narratives that populate the objects of their analysis. Ananya Roy specifically evokes ‘a rather paradoxical combination of specificity and generalizability’: in which theories have to be produced in place (and it matters where they are produced), but can then be appropriated, borrowed, and remapped. Such theory would then be simultaneously located and dislocated (Roy, 2009). Among others, Edgar Pieterse has been particularly vocal in favor of the adoption of a ‘more grounded, spatially attuned and phronetic research [...] which can potentially yield the microscopic details of everyday practices as imagined and experienced by the contemporary protagonists of the city’ (Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 26). Another author that has chosen to focus his research on urban practice is John Forester, in his *Exploring urban practice in a democratizing society: opportunities, techniques and challenges* (2006). In this paper, Forester presents a useful opportunity to discuss the meanings of ‘practice’ that structure planning theory today (Roy, 2007).

By close consideration of carefully collected oral history accounts of planners, public administrators, community organisers and leaders, a great deal can be learned about both the challenges of governance and the opportunities that insightful and skilful practitioners can seize. (Forester, 2006, p. 569)

In his analysis of South African urban practices, Forester argues that ‘practice stories’ are the material basis of planning philosophy and that the micro-practices of planning are much more complex and nuanced than normative rules, codes and evaluations. To this end, he suggests that we not ask ‘what to do’ but rather study ‘how they really did it’. He also suggests that South African planners and researchers might ‘appropriate critically for their own ends’ the practice stories that emerge from the Euro-American context. The paper is divided into three parts: The first part introduces the subjects of his analysis, being community



planners, urban designers, community organizers or housing activists. The second part summarizes the techniques and approaches, utilized to explore “what these engaged practitioners not only face, but can accomplish” (Forester, 2006, p. 570). And ultimately, the third part seeks to build upon the first two to clarify opportunities to analyze, learn from – and to improve – South African planning and design practices. In this process, Forester outlines four main challenges to this type of research:

These problems grow from traditions of thought that reduce politics to exchange, objectivity to quantification, representation to abstraction, and ethics to mere prescription. In all these ways, weak theory can hamper our study of how planners and activists work, for better or worse, in the face of (and with) power. We can call these challenges:

- 1) The problem of moral resonance – doing narrative justice in the ways we write;
- 2) The problem of being practical – recognizing situated stories as revelatory;
- 3) The problem of complexity and pain – needing not labels, but to look and see;
- 4) The problem of ethics – learning about value.

To meet these challenges, we need to resist the temptation to look for abstracted, pithy labels, keys, instrumental solutions – and we have to get closer, to do more justice, to the stresses, dangers, risks and opportunities of real work. (Forester, 2006, p. 575)

Reacting to Forester’s paper, Ananya Roy highlights three main weaknesses of this approach. First, she argues that his notion of ‘urban practice’ is curiously disembodied and de-territorialized, while she suggests exploring the idea of urban practice from the perspective of South African urban realities rather than simply its practices. Second, is to contemplate what urban practice may entail in the post-modern and post-apartheid city. Third, is to interrogate the concept of the ‘actor’ that animates Forester’s ‘practice stories’.

To answer the first point, Roy argues that the idea of urban practice would actually benefit being explored from the perspective of South African urban realities and that context-specific questions and debates can help refashion the truths of planning practice.

The second point concerns the informalization of South African cities and concerns “the ‘uncaptured urbanites’: those who on the one hand are deprived of the rights of full citizenship and on the other able to escape ‘economic, coercive, and normative capture by the state’ through their hyper-mobility” (Roy, 2007, p. 624). She therefore asks:

In the face of such volatile transience, what is the public sphere within which planning usually acts? Who constitutes the ‘public’ of planning action? If planning is seen to be the action of the state, what sovereign power can cities wield in relationship to such ‘weightless’ (Kihato & Landau, 2006: 15) urban populations? Or, if planning is seen to be the action of civil society, what then are the forms of belonging and self-governance that can be seen to emerge from this realm of ‘uncaptured urbanites’?

Third, she introduces Watson’s (2006) idea of ‘deep difference’:

In the face of ‘deep difference’, i.e. a ‘fractured public interest’, how can planners act in the public interest? To do so, can they simply mediate and facilitate or must they also introduce, as Watson argues, a set of values into the deliberative process? In other words, in a world fraught with moral struggle and ambiguity, must they not admit and confront normative difference? Such questions are also preceded by more simple and fundamental questions: How can planners understand and map ‘deep difference’? Are planners trained to do so? Forester argues that planning practice cannot be reduced to the shorthand labels of ‘power’, ‘racism’, etc. [...] Yet, must not planners come to terms with such forms of difference and hierarchy? And how do such forms of political rationality coexist with the communicative rationality that is often lauded as ideal planning practice?

Ultimately, Roy questions the dimensions of space with which planners work:

If planning is a future-oriented and place-centred enterprise, then the uncertainty and hyper-mobility of the informalised South African city requires planners to rethink their spatio-temporal location. Take the dimension of space. Following Michel de Certeau, Mbembe (2000: 261) makes a distinction between a ‘place’ as an ‘instantaneous configuration of positions’, something with ‘stability’, and ‘territory’, which is ‘fundamentally an intersection of moving bodies’, ‘defined essentially by the set of movements that take place

within it'. For Mbembe, 'Africa' is 'territory' rather than 'place': 'a set of possibilities that historically situated actors constantly resist or realize'.

And time:

The 'figure of the subject in the time of crisis' is one that must not only negotiate and transform space (often through techniques of piracy and informality) but must also negotiate an uncertain future. The urban practice of negotiating with time, with the future, can be seen as planning. In the context of African cities, such planning seems to be primarily the planning of movement, of hyper-mobility, of aspiring to be elsewhere. It is thus that Simone (2006) writes of cities such as Douala as 'sites of evacuation', as dematerialised places where everyone wants to be elsewhere. This 'being on the move' is also of course a modality of deferral – of not engaging with the place at hand because one is already planning to be somewhere else. This excess of deferral creates the territory (rather than 'place') of possibilities that Mbembe designates as 'Africa'.

Roy's reflections offer a great many thoughts about the performance of practice-based research in contemporary African cities, adding much-needed layer of depth to the argument as proposed by Forester. These ideas have been taken into account during the elaboration of this research and in the shape of its approach.

The field of this research is that of urban development; the agents are selected among different positions in this field being architects, planners or real estate developers; its habitus and case study, is Accra Airport City.

### **1.1.3. This Research**

This thesis was elaborated during four years, between 2013 and 2017. Field research was conducted during three trips to West Africa between 2013 and 2015, for a total of six months spent on the field, between Ghana and Ivory Coast.

The research first provides an overview of the discourse about African and Global cities, with the goal of establishing the theoretical framework within which the research takes place. African cities are analyzed starting from the narratives that surround the African continent at large, which give an idea of the level of generalization that has characterized its depiction in the global media, and which unfortunately also seems

to apply to the discourse about its urban environment. The narratives about African urbanization have been the most varied and do not seem to have been always based on reliable data. In fact, the debate about what is meant by 'African cities' is still very much open, even among the most experienced scholars.

Similar confusion characterizes the discourse about Global cities, whose identity and role nowadays seem to have become as blurry as those of African cities have. Nonetheless, the impact of globalization on the urban environment and architecture has been significant, which is why, while it is probably time to move on about the hierarchization of global and non-global cities, it is equally interesting to investigate the extent and the characteristics of the results of global and local tensions in the urban environment. This research argues, in accordance with Jennifer Robinson's (2006) proposition, that it is time to move beyond a westernized, hierarchical theoretical conceptualization of contemporary cities, which, in their infinite variety of declinations are all interconnected. African cities, global cities, world cities, are after all just 'ordinary cities'.

Global and local tensions are very much palpable in the forms and the practices of Accra Airport City. West Africa is a region that has always been 'global' to some extent, and today is no exception. Business is thriving despite recent political and economic headwinds, and the region continues to attract huge influx of foreign capital, a consistent part of which, in Real Estate. Ghana and Accra are particularly interesting under this point of view due to their history of political stability, which allows them to be considered as comparable to any other politically stable country both from the region and beyond. In that, Accra shows the potentials but also the challenges that face any city undergoing rapid urban and economic growth.

Accra has a history of business districts, with Airport city being its third and last variation on the theme. Its buildings are the results of investment from across half of the world, and this is expressed through its architecture. A shopping mall, high-end hotels and the first certified energy-efficient building in the region populate its skyline. The prices for commercial office space are among the highest in the city, but after a period of huge growth, demand seems to be falling short of expectations. The development pipeline is still moving forward, but the pace has definitely slowed down compared to the past decade.

All of this is reflected in the stories of six local practitioners, from different backgrounds and with different degrees of experience, but all involved in first person in the global-local cultural and technical milieu that characterizes the development of Accra's urban environment. Their stories are integrated with documents from their practice in order to provide some context to their narratives. The methodology hereby utilized is inspired by the concept of 'thick description', as first introduced by philosopher Gilbert Ryle and later developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. 'Thick description' is an inductive approach, which bases its analysis not only on facts but also on commentary, interpretation and interpretations of those comments and interpretations. In that sense, thick description is utilized to not explain just the behavior, but also its context, in order for the behavior to become meaningful to an external viewer (Geertz, 1973, pp. 5–6, 9–10; Ryle, 1968).

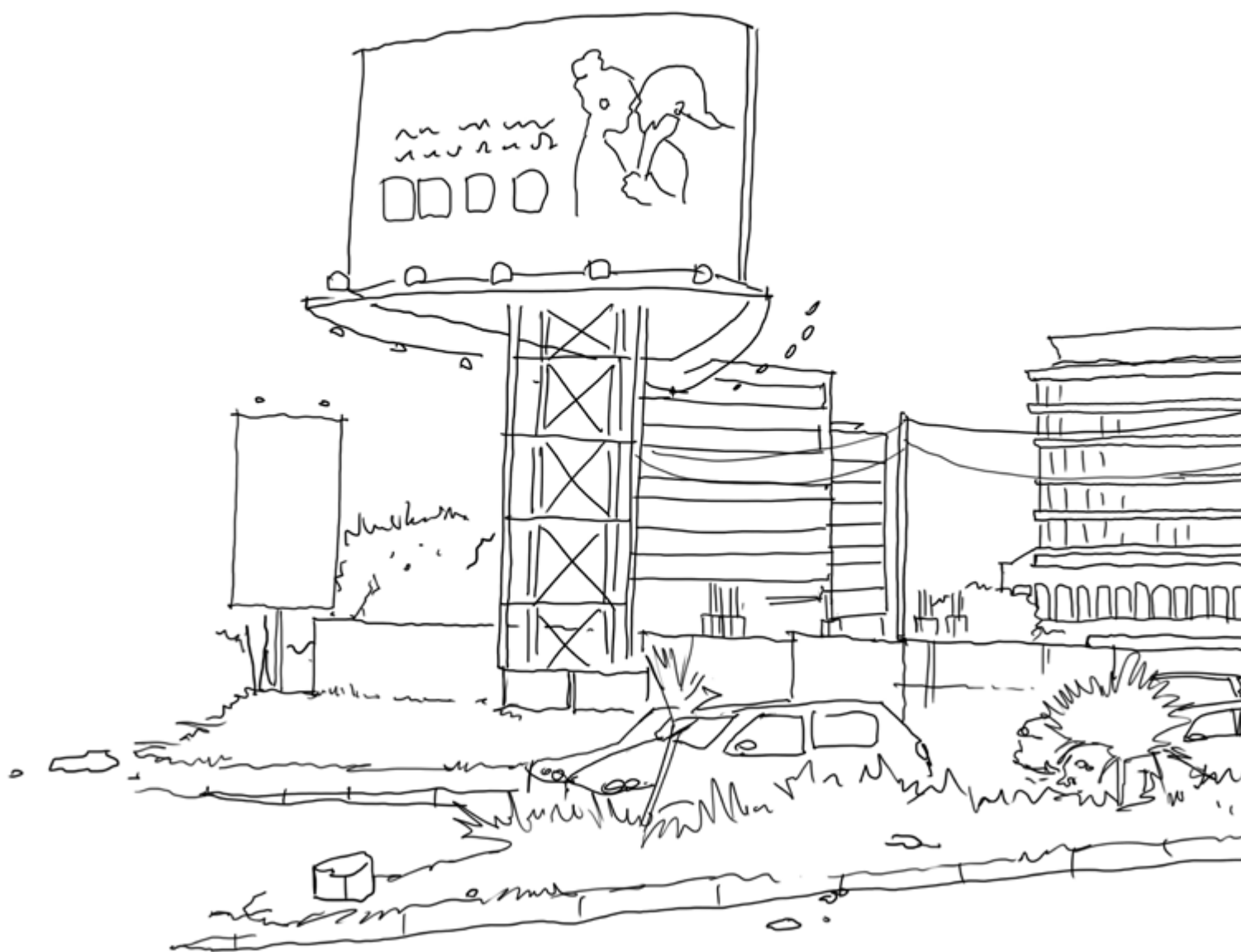
The issues that emerge from the practice, the theory and the forms are highlighted and successively expanded by framing them within scientific literature about Accra and urban research at large, with the goal of bridging the gap between local issues and global trends.

Photographic montages called "scenes" were realized interpretatively, by re-assembling the pictures taken on site. Through these visual dichotomies, they illustrate three contrasting aspects of Airport City: the globalized forms of its architecture against the localized leftovers of frenetic urban development; the luxuries of private access against the lack of infrastructure and basic urban design elements; the presence of international shopping brands and the global market of goods against the ubiquitous and fundamental presence of street vendors. In addition to their content, these intentionally provocative images were also created to represent the subjectivity that every image about the urban environment carries within itself. It is impossible to portray the complexity of the urban environment in its entirety, therefore this research explicitly declares its subjectivity and by doing that chooses not to pretend to represent everything that is 'going on' in Airport City, but rather provide a description and an interpretation of some of its specific aspects which might or might not be present elsewhere. By not limiting its scope to African/West African/cities of the global South, this 'elsewhere' could be anywhere, which is ultimately the idea of contemporary urban research to which this work looks up to.

Chapters two, three and four, attempt to answer the first three questions of phronetic research:

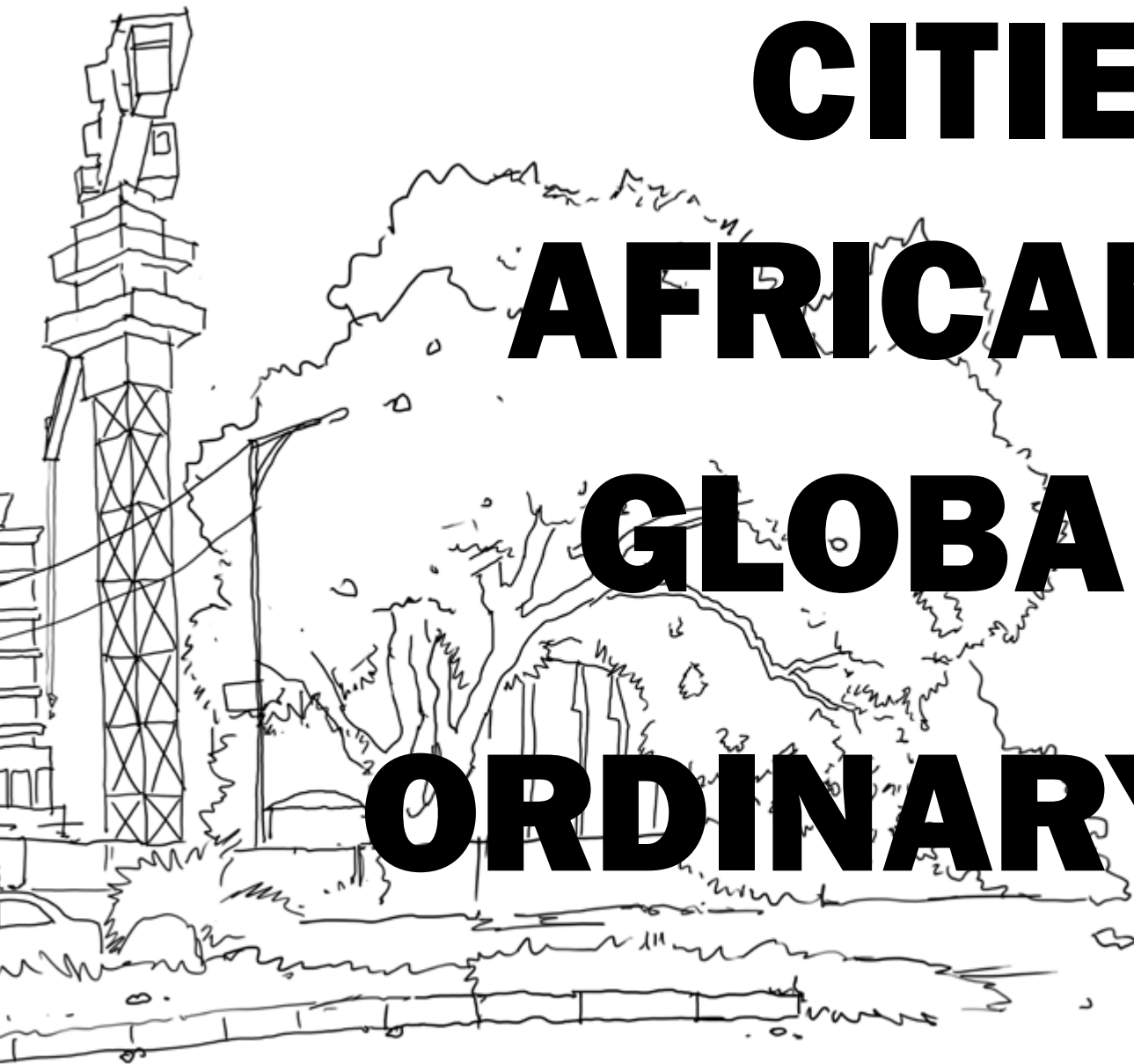
- 1) What is currently going on, and what outcome is to be expected if things do not change?
- 2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
- 3) Is this development desirable?

The final chapter of this thesis instead focuses on what, if anything, should (and could) be done about these issues. The answers to this last question could be the subject of entire research works in as of themselves. In this case, the attempt is to retrace the root of the problem to its practical origins, and provide similarly practical answers and references to address the issues at hand.



2

**CITIES:  
AFRICAN/  
GLOBAL/  
ORDINARY/**







The *Alkebu-lan 1260 AH* map by Nikolaj Georgii-Hemming Cyon<sup>1</sup> displayed in the previous page illustrates what Africa would have looked like in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century if Europe had never become a colonizing world power. It depicts an alternative historical time-line in which Europe was struck by the plague in the 1350's and never recovered, allowing African nations to flourish unhindered. Setting aside its content, it is interesting in that it takes a common geographical assumption and reverses it, to see what would change by simply changing our perspective upon it.

This research attempts to shift rather than completely reverse the common perception of Africa and its cities within the contemporary global landscape. It does so starting from the narratives that characterize the continent and its oscillation between crisis and opportunity. It focuses then on the somehow similar interpretations of the implications of its recent urban growth, and ultimately addresses the elephant in the room: What are African cities?

Global cities have been at the center of similar debate and their definition seems to be just as in question. Nonetheless, the influence of globalization on the urban environment and architecture is factual, and worth analyzing when one sets out to investigate the urban development dynamics of a 'Globalizing City' (Grant, 2009).

The goal of this chapter is to set up the theoretical and scientific framework necessary to move beyond a perception of urban Africa as being essentially 'different.' It also contests interpretations of Africa's cities that construe them as ontologically different from other cities of the world (Fourchard, 2011), while illustrating the impact and depth of global and local tensions on the urban environment and architecture.

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<sup>1</sup> The project is about real precolonial African nations that existed between the 15<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, based on historical maps. Source: cyon.se

## 2.1 AFRICAN CITIES

The urbanization of the world is a kind of exteriorization of the inside as well as interiorization of the outside: the urban unfolds into the countryside just as the countryside folds back into the city . . . Yet the fault-lines between these two worlds aren't defined by any simple urban-rural divide, nor by anything North-South. (Merrifield, 2011, pp. 468–9)

While the African continent catalyzed the world's attention with narratives about its economic development, African cities generated similarly polarizing views about their urbanization. Urban Africa represents one of the least explored and yet more insightful objects of analysis for contemporary urban studies (Malaquais, 2006; Pieterse & Simone, 2013). Ever since the 2000's commodity boom<sup>2</sup>, the pace and dynamics of urbanization in the African continent have made the headlines of countless papers, articles and reports. International exhibitions show fantastic pictures and drawings about African modern and contemporary architecture and the fascinating decadence of its historical buildings.<sup>3</sup> Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas, 2007) famously described Lagos as being a city at the 'forefront of a globalizing modernity' but as Armelle Choplin (2012) notes, such an approach can lead one to entertain certain romanticized visions, or even culturalist visions, where the creativity of the 'African Man' is praised, presenting the Southern city as a work of art in the making, which might give out the image of a completely depoliticized and dehistoricised space (Fourchard, 2006). The point being, that Af-

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2 The 2000s commodities boom or the commodities super cycle (Ng, 2013) was the rise, and fall, of many physical commodity prices (such as those of food stuffs, oil, metals, chemicals, fuels and the like) which occurred during the first two decades of the 2000s (2000–2014), following the Great Commodities Depression of the 1980s and 1990s.

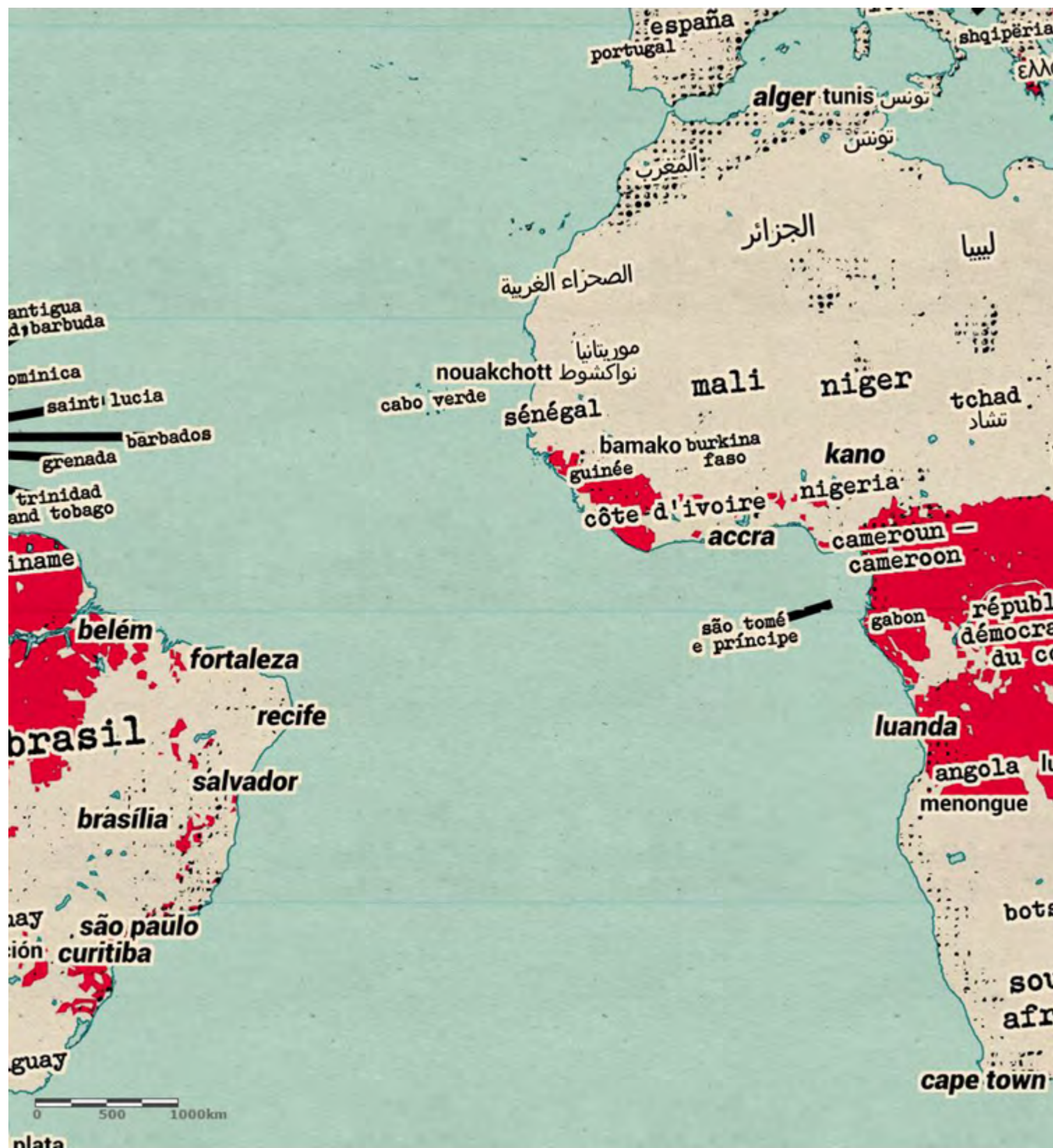
3 Between 2015 and 2016, the following exhibitions took place: Vitra Design Museum Gallery's 'Architecture of Independence – African Modernism' and 'Making Africa – A Continent of Contemporary Design' exhibitions (<http://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailseiten/african-modernism.html>); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art's 'Africa. Architecture, Culture and Identity' (<https://en.louisiana.dk/exhibition/africa>); and Philadelphia Museum of Art's 'Creative Africa' which comprised five different exhibitions about contemporary Africa (<http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/838.html>).

*rican Cities* have an active role in the construction of narratives about the African continent and its position in the global economy (van der Merwe, 2004).

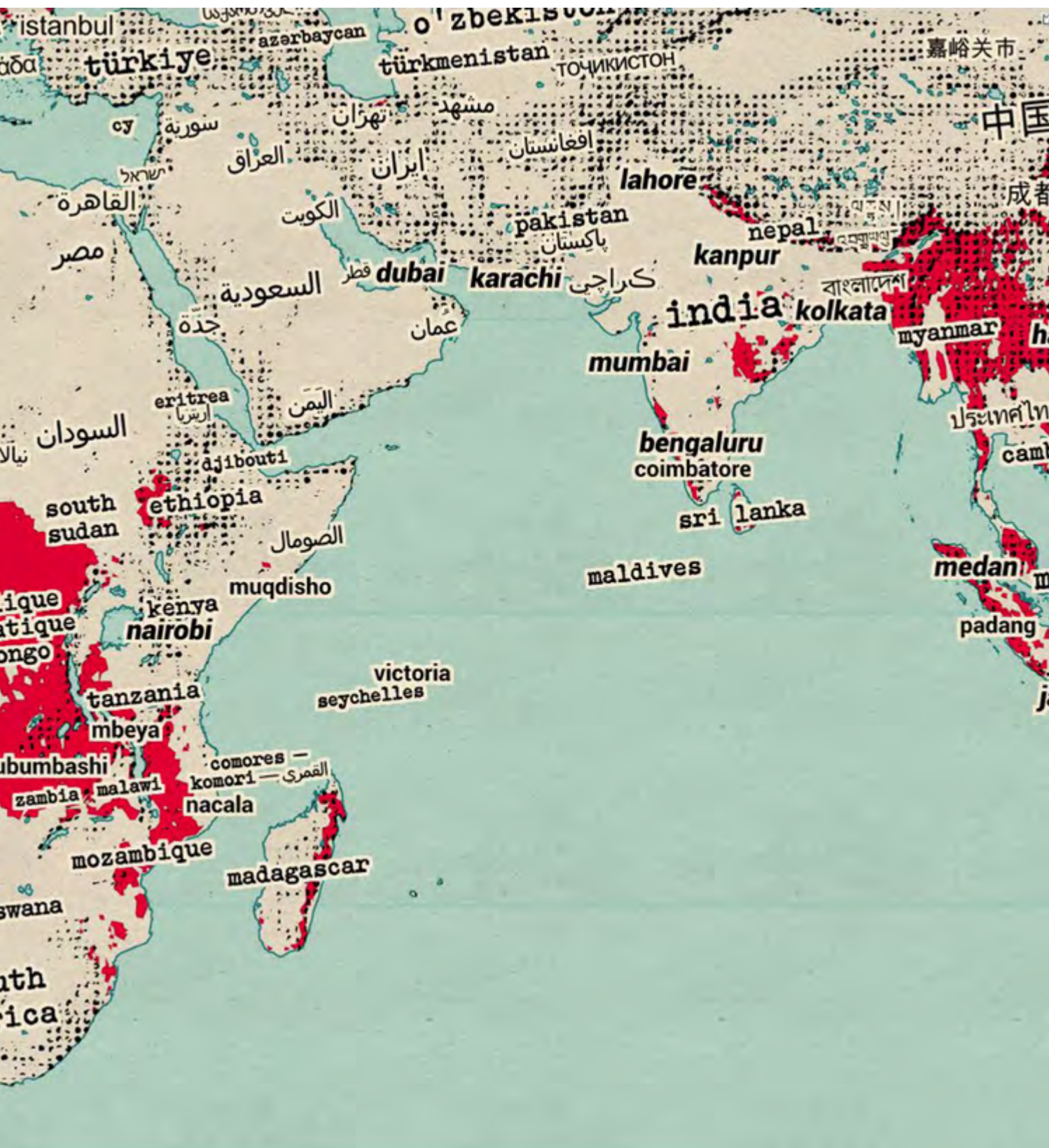
Africa's political scene has been characterized almost exclusively by civil wars, military coups, and disorders of every sort in the media, we fail to see the complexity of a situation that needs reformulation rather than demonization. Thus the instability that forms a large aspect of the media distortion has been associated, promoted, and reinforced with pictures of persistent misery, famine, and insecurity in the selective account of the West. But the issue is not to question whether these simplifications have or have not its basis in reality. Clearly, African urban and social fabrics are under severe strain and the continuous human flow from the countryside to the city has virtually shifted poverty and environmental degradation to urban areas...As any other urban space around the world, African cities are of course centers for the migration and refuge of increasing numbers of people. As such, they are also the meeting place and battleground for two conflicting worlds of power and impotence, wealth and poverty, corruption and hope, center and periphery. But the issue we want to emphasize is that African cities are not only outlined by these troubling bifurcations. Nor do we wish to reproduce only the image of cities riddled with crime, grinding poverty, overcrowded suburbs, and shantytowns, congested living spaces that usually lack essential services and are breeding grounds of disease, ethnic violence, high mortality rate, or the persistent degradation of their environments. These are certainly important issues, which need addressing. Yet, our attention is persistently called to focus on the ethical accounting of these cities' dynamism as hosts of great potentials, which challenge the often gloomy, doomsday pictures painted by the popular media. As part of the complexity of the issues at play within these urban conditions, there may be a need to highlight the reality of these cities as vibrant spaces recapturing the possibility for self-constitution. (Enwezor, 2002, pp. 7–8)

Consequently, in the past decade Africa has been a particularly attractive destination for foreign investment in the Real Estate sector. Entire new cities were created during those years and others are still being built in the continent, employing thousands of people and sourcing construction materials both globally and locally. Key issues such as sustainability









or public transportation – with some notable exceptions<sup>4</sup> – are often overlooked, to great detriment of the urban public sphere. While Luanda, the capital of Angola is among the most expensive cities in the world (Vanham, 2015), Lagos is growing in a climate of constant experimentation, dealing with issues such as land rights, lack of planning, overpopulation, sanitation and much more (Haak, 2005). Today, Cairo is building a constellation of new cities in its suburbs, including a new 700 km<sup>2</sup> administrative capital, funded by Chinese companies (Kirk, 2016) and Abidjan is set to become the major maritime hub in the West African coast (Pinsent Masons, 2015). Following ‘the Ghanaian economic miracle’ (Marfo, 2012) Accra seemed to be en route to become a ‘superstar city’ (Buckley & Mathema, 2007) but has suffered from the oil crisis and its development has slowed down considerably since 2014. Across the African continent, cities are evolving at an unprecedented place. Yet, most of the scientific literature still utilizes the epitome *African Cities* to describe a group of objects that, at the same time, have been widely acknowledged among scholars as much too heterogeneous to be grouped together. Urban studies research in Africa presents some peculiar characteristics: the lack of reliable data, the challenges for conducting field research and the scarcity of available research work are just but few among them. At the same time, if framed within the continent’s recent evolution, these challenges can also represent valuable opportunities for urban research. There is a need for locally-focused work, that needs to ‘emanate ‘from’ rather than ‘towards’ the African city (Mbembé & Nuttall, 2004).

This research contests the use of the ‘African cities’ label and the never-ending quest for common traits among them. It stresses the importance to understand the specific characteristics of each region and market, which might later show some similitudes to other cities in Africa, but also Asia, South America, or Europe for that matter. However, since the scientific discourse seems to be so fragmented, it is still vital to understand how African cities have been represented both in scientific literature and non- (and why), which is the purpose of this chapter.

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4 Some important public transportation upgrades are taking place, such as and the first energy efficient buildings starting to populate the skylines of African cities like Accra, Kigali and Windhoek and the construction of the first metro in Sub Saharan Africa in Addis Ababa



### 2.1.1. Narratives of Development

The representation of African cities in contemporary theory suffers from the same degree of approximation and *westernization* as the continent at large. In 2017, Africa is still generally described as a whole, only seldom differentiating between North and Sub Saharan Africa and in most cases completely ignoring the differences among its macro regions of West/East/Central and South Africa, which would probably represent an over generalization in any case. Narratives about African cities are an organic part of broader narratives about the continent; therefore, to understand the former, one must understand the latter, or at least the big picture within which these narratives are produced.

It is time to move beyond the classification of developed/developing emerged/emerging markets. In 2015, the World Bank acknowledged it, and pledged to phase out the use of ‘developing only’ regional classifications. ‘If the ‘developing world’ classification is being used to group countries with similar attributes, where people experience similar lives, its use seems increasingly inappropriate’ (Khokhar, 2015). Additionally, a number of other political and economic institutions are starting to recognize the obsolescence of these concepts, and the debate is now open about their definition. In an interview, Jonathan Wheatley from the *Financial Times*, defines an Emerging market as:

The term began as a euphemism for the pejorative-sounding ‘third world’ but ‘emerging market’ now stands for a haphazard collection of countries with varying economic sizes and growth rates. The classification matters primarily because of index providers such as MSCI and JPMorgan that have a major influence over how international portfolio investors allocate their money. An estimated \$10.3tn is invested in so-called emerging markets. This helps explain why Greece’s stock market actually rallied when the country was demoted from developed to emerging status by MSCI in November 2013. Less than \$200m of passive money tracking developed market indices would seep out of Greece as a result, according to one HSBC estimate, while inflows from emerging markets investors could top \$1bn.

#### Above

*The Economist* magazine covers.  
*The Economist*, 2000, 2011.



*In terms of numbers, the Emerging Markets in the world, are*

According to the International Monetary Fund 152. Just 23, says MSCI.

The IMF classification basically comes from dividing the world in two: advanced economies, and emerging and developing economies. Its criteria are per capita income, export diversification and degree of integration into the global financial system. MSCI, by contrast, approaches the issue from the point of view of investible equities, so its division of the world into developed, emerging and frontier markets is based on the level of market access to foreign investors, and standards of size and liquidity. MSCI offers a Frontier Emerging Markets Index, with 163 equities from 28 countries — of which four: Colombia, Egypt, Peru and the Philippines are also represented in its Emerging Markets Index. Launched in 1988 it includes the shares of 838 listed companies from just 23 countries including 85 per cent of the market capitalisation of equities in each nation, weighted according to free float (the shares available to investors).

*But do emerging markets actually emerge?*

Not really. Argentina once had developed status and lost it — as did Greece. Japan and Singapore are widely said to have gained developed status since the second world war, but others, such as Venezuela, seem to be ‘submerging’ instead in that its economy has imploded under policy mismanagement, with soaring inflation, a collapsing currency and widespread shortages of the most basic household essentials.

At issue is an idea implicit in the emerging markets concept: that those economies are on the way up, riding an escalator to developed market status. Some may be. But others are not.

*Ultimately, what is ‘all the fuss’ about this term now?*

Because investors, economists and commentators are coming to the conclusion that it has outlived its usefulness and has actually become counter-productive. (Wheatley, 2015)

The current economic hierarchy, which places emerging nations at the periphery and developed markets at the core of world affairs, no longer accurately describes a world in which emerging countries contribute with a bigger share to global gross domestic product than their developed

counterparts, when measured by purchasing power parity. The category, which groups together countries of such diverse economic strengths as China and the Czech Republic, does not even attempt to take into account the fundamentally different realities between these nations. 'The EM term has outgrown its usefulness,' says Michael Power, strategist at Investec, a fund management company. 'The term today embraces big and small, developed and under-developed, industrialized and agrarian, manufacturing and commodity-based, rich and poor, deficit runners and surplus runners, and I could go on,' he adds (Kynge & Wheatley, 2015). Nonetheless, the issue is not to be dismissed, as emerging markets is one of the most powerful definitions in the world, 'with an estimated \$10.3tn invested in emerging financial markets via an alphabet soup of equity and bond indices' (Ibid.). The term also represents one of the basic principles for global databases and an analytical starting point for those who seek insights into economic, environmental, social and other trends that shape the world. The problem is that this is recognized to generate flawed perceptions and fuzzy arguments that impact on the efficiency of global governance.

'As an asset class, EM equities are nearly finished,' says John Paul Smith at Ecstrat, an investment consultancy. 'The old paradigm is dead.' (Ibid.)

In 2016, the World Bank has made a big change to its World Development Indicators, in which it no longer distinguishes between 'developed' countries and 'developing' ones in the presentation of its data. As Tim Fernholz points out, while 'the change marks an evolution in thinking about the geographic distribution of poverty and prosperity[...]It sounds less radical when you consider that nobody has ever agreed on a definition for these terms in the first place' (Fernholz, 2016). Other institutions like the International Monetary Fund admit that their own distinction between advanced and emerging market economies 'is not based on strict criteria, economic or otherwise' and that the United Nations does not have an official definition of a developing country, despite labelling 159 nations as 'developing.' As Umar Serajuddin, senior economist in the World Bank's statistics office clearly epitomizes, 'the main issue is that there is just so much heterogeneity between Malawi and Malaysia for both to be classified in the same group – Malaysia is more like the US than Malawi. When we lump disparate countries together in the same group, it isn't really useful' (Fernholz, 2016). This change

of perspective is partly a consequence of the shift from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), created by the UN in 1990 as a road map for fighting global poverty, to the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set in 2015 by the global community. ‘MDGs were meant to be for the developing countries. [...] There were the helpers, and the ones that needed help’ Serajuddin says, ‘the SDG views every country as needing development, and it’s universal’ (ibid.).

According to some, commentators are already proposing alternatives to the definition, seeking to identify possible ordering principles and shared dynamics among clusters of developing countries. The hope is that these will allow institutions, companies and multilateral organizations to assess more accurately the balance of risk and opportunity in large parts of the world.

Africa’s role in contemporary global economy is becoming increasingly important, thanks to its fertile land, its key geographic position along trade routes, its young and growing demographics and its commodity reserves. While East Asian countries, and most notably China<sup>5</sup>, seem to have adopted a clear policy of interaction with a number of countries across the continent – so far that some went as far as defining Africa as *China’s second continent* (French, 2015) and sometimes with mixed end results for Africans (Bradsher & Nossiter, 2015) – Western and European nations still offer highly conflicting perspectives of the continent’s economic reality and its opportunities and risks. As some suggest, ‘economics might have an Africa problem’ (Chelwa, 2105). Morten Jerven (2015) explains how economists who study Africa tend to use dodgy theory and inappropriate statistical techniques, and at times deliberately mislead about the reality of the continent. The author asks how it is possible that for decades people have tried to explain why Africa has stubbornly remained poor. Explanations range from the legacy of colo-

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5 The Chinese presence in Africa, has upset the global balance of power (Moyo, 2012) with its millions of migrants and billions of investment: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increased thirty-fold between 2003 and 2011, from US\$491m to US\$14.7 billion. In 2012, China pledged US\$20 billion of loans to Africa over three years for infrastructure, agriculture and manufacturing. If the funds are committed, China will become Africa’s principal financial backer. China is already Africa’s leading bilateral trade partner. Two-way trade grew from US\$10.6 billion in 2000 to US\$166 billion in 2011. (A.R.I., 2012) in the continent, and has led authors such as Howard D. French to define it as ‘China’s second continent’ (French, 2015). All of this is having an impact on African cities today (Kuo, 2015), and similarly, did have a great impact on cities like Accra at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

nialism and dependency on natural resources to ‘some inherent character flaw’ (The Economist, 2015a). Such perspective has extended into the academic world, as Kevin Cox and Rohit Negi add:

Political institutions judged deficient are common media images of sub-Saharan Africa: a landscape of weak if not failed states, tribalism and civil war, and a sharp disjuncture between the formal character of whatever democratic institutions exist and how politics is conducted in practice. The result of this, it is claimed, is the material backwardness of sub-Saharan Africa: a failure to develop. These views are extraordinarily rife. They have, in turn, found their way into more academic understandings. The state and its relation to society emerge as the central problem: the argument is that given the state’s weakness and the vacuity of representative institutions we should not expect anything other than developmental failure. (Cox & Negi, 2010, p. 71)

As evidence, economists usually rely on statistical tests, crunching data from dozens of countries across many decades. But this approach, as Jerven argues, places too much trust in African data, much of which is unreliable. In 2014 GDP growth in South Sudan was either 5% or 36%, depending on whether you believe the IMF or the World Bank. Estimates vary wildly because African industrial surveys are often out-of-date and many national-statistics bodies treat their economies as if they had not changed in decades. The author continues, explaining how one would assume that economists would hesitate before conducting even the simplest analysis of the continent, papers employ highly complex statistical techniques to make ambitious arguments:

An influential paper by two economists from MIT and one from Harvard argues that income levels in African countries today were shaped by the rate at which colonial settlers died there centuries before. The paper suggests that when areas were disease-ridden, colonists would plunder all they could, then flee. The resulting chaos echoed down the centuries. But when the disease environment was benign, colonists would set up shop, creating a more harmonious society that laid the foundations for growth.

In Jerven’s perspective, it is this type of research that exemplifies all that is wrong with economists’ views of Africa. ‘If people cannot even be sure about African countries’ GDP today, what hope for centuries-old

data? Yet economists are rarely frank about the uncertainties that plague their data' (Ibid.). Papers like this compresses centuries of history into statistical tests.

This is something of a current fad. Recent contributions find that African countries' poverty today may be explained, for example, by the fact that in pre-colonial times the tse-tse fly thrived there or that their pre-colonial populations could not digest milk. All this wacky economics ignores the complex history in between, he says, and so is of little value. (Ibid.)

The point is rather to find the factors that have a systematic influence, combining this with detailed historical work on individual countries and deep, contextualized, studies of history and institutions. After famously labelling the continent as 'hopeless' in 2000, one-decade later international magazine *The Economist* went back on its steps:

Since *The Economist* regrettably labelled Africa 'the hopeless continent' a decade ago, a profound change has taken hold. Labour productivity has been rising. It is now growing by, on average, 2.7% a year. Trade between Africa and the rest of the world has increased by 200% since 2000. Inflation dropped from 22% in the 1990's to 8% in the past decade. Foreign debts declined by a quarter, budget deficits by two-thirds. In eight of the past ten years, according to the World Bank, sub-Saharan growth has been faster than East Asia's (though that does include Japan).

Even after revising downward its 2012 forecast because of a slowdown in the northern hemisphere, the IMF still expects sub-Saharan Africa's economies to expand by 5.75% next year. Several big countries are likely to hit growth rates of 10%. The World Bank—not known for boosterism—said in a report this year that 'Africa could be on the brink of an economic take-off, much like China was 30 years ago and India 20 years ago,' though its officials think major poverty reduction will require higher growth than today's—a long-term average of 7% or more.

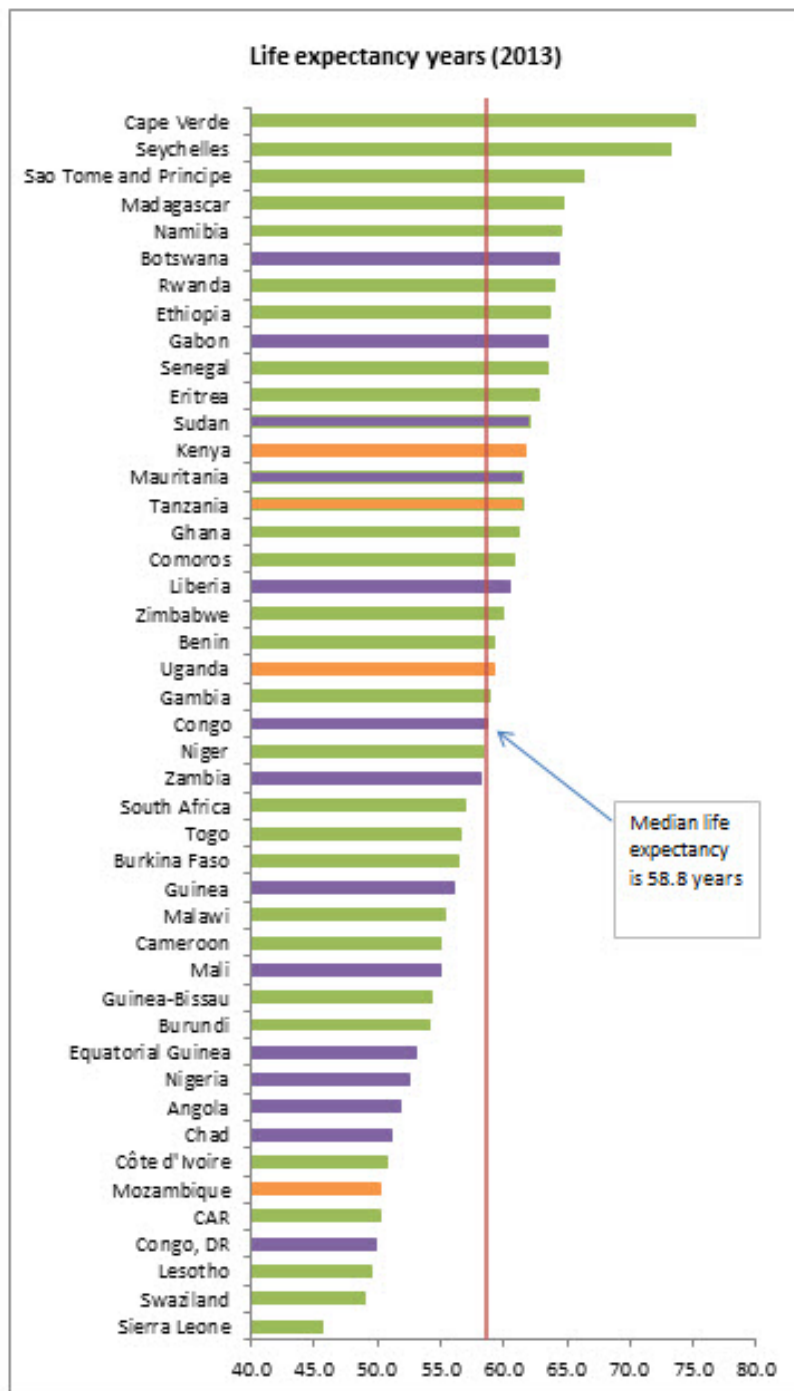
There is another point of comparison with Asia: demography. Africa's population is set to double, from 1 billion to 2 billion, over the next 40 years. As Africa's population grows in size, it will also alter in shape. The median age is now 20, compared with 30 in Asia and 40 in Europe. With fertility rates dropping, that median will rise as today's mass of young people moves into its most productive years. The ratio of peo-

ple of working age to those younger and older—the dependency ratio—will improve. This ‘demographic dividend’ was crucial to the growth of East Asian economies a generation ago. It offers a huge opportunity to Africa today.

Seen through a bullish eye, this reinforces exuberant talk of ‘lion economies’ analogous to the Asian tigers. But there are caveats. For one thing, in Africa, perhaps even more so than in Asia, wildly different realities can exist side by side. Averaging out failed states and phenomenal success stories is of limited value. The experience of the leaders is an unreliable guide to what will become of the laggards. For another, these are early days, and there have been false dawns before. Those of bearish mind will ask whether the lions can match the tigers for stamina. Will Africa continue to rise? Or is this merely a strong upswing in a boom-bust cycle that will inevitably come tumbling back down? (The Economist, 2011)

Africa is developing, but it is unclear – into what, and how (Adams, 2015; Bonaglia & Wegner, 2014). It is perceived as ‘rising’<sup>6</sup> and some went as far as considering it as the ‘last region of sizeable untapped growth’ (Goncalves, 2015). Nonetheless, authors such as Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu ask whether Africa is engaging the world – and globalization – on its own terms or we are witnessing another ‘more-sophisticated-than-1885-Berlin scramble for Africa?’ (Moghalu, 2014, p. 5). The question is legitimate. Even if one is to assume that Africa is rising, how does that translate in practice? In a series of articles, the World Bank explores this very question.

From Accra to Addis to Angola, Africa’s rise is undeniable. Shopping malls, high-rises and an urban middle class are now familiar features of Africa’s cities. Following two decades of unprecedented economic growth, ‘Africa Can’ and ‘Africa’s 21st Century’ have become the defining narratives for the region. On the other hand, nagging questions remain about the extent to which Africa’s people’s lives have improved. As one taxi driver kept on telling us in Accra:



#### **This page**

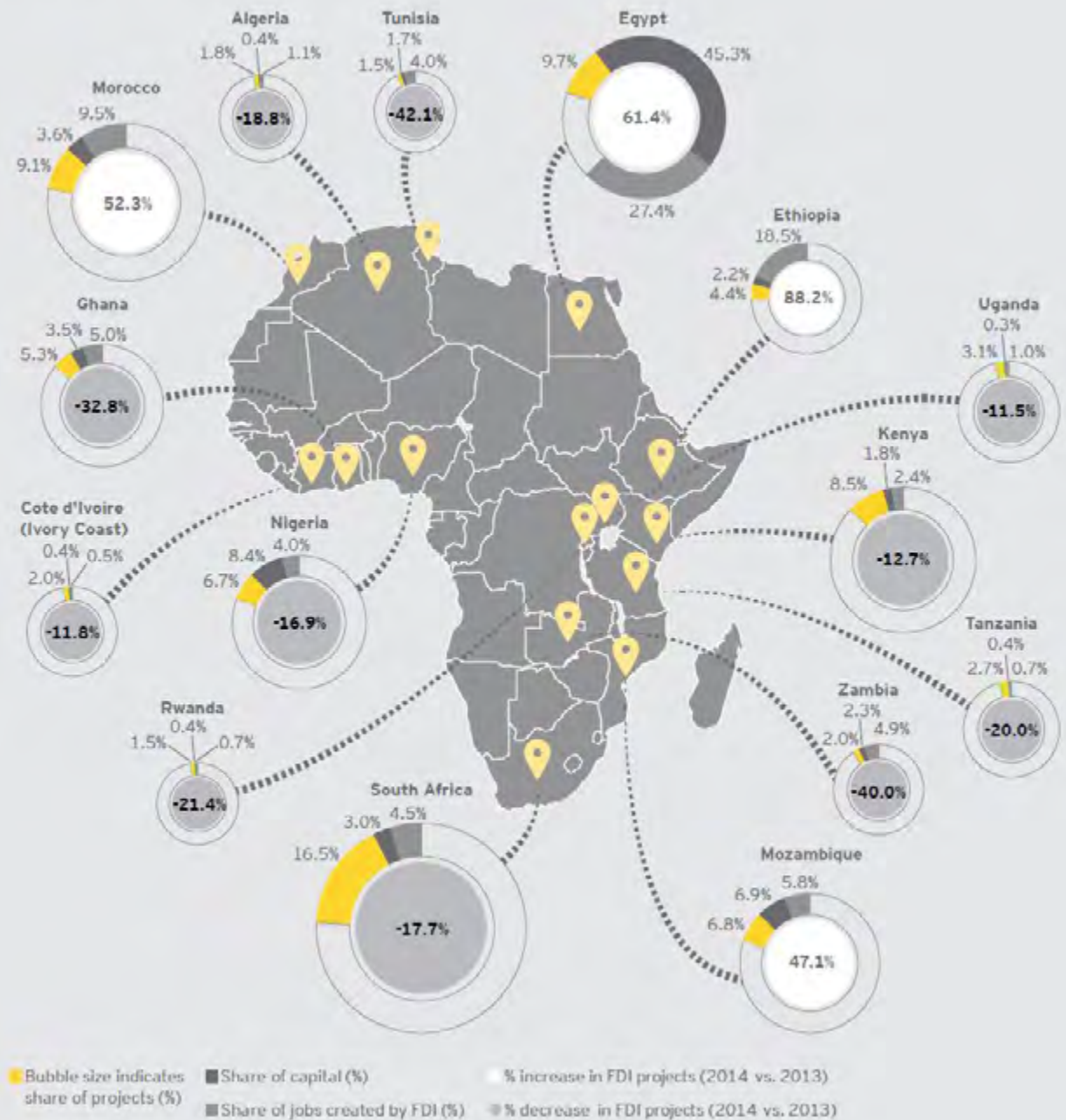
Non-resource rich countries green  
resource rich countries purple  
East African countries with discovered resources orange.

Source: UNDP Human Development Index 2013

#### **Opposite page**

Top 15 countries by FDI projects (2014)  
(EY, 2015, p. 15)

## Top 15 countries by FDI projects (2014)



Source: fdi Markets, February 2015.



‘I can’t eat growth.’ Unfortunately, there is little systematic evidence available to show our driver. (Beegle & Christiaensen, 2015)

The article illustrates how, the bulk of Africa’s growth over the past 20 years has been driven by high commodity prices (which have since fallen dramatically). Africa’s population expanded rapidly (at 2.7% per year), making the 4.5% annual growth recorded during 1995-2013 look much less impressive. All the while, extreme wealth has been on the upswing. Nonetheless, they also recognize how the challenge of assessing how much income poverty has come down is not made any easier by the lack of comparable, good quality data. Yet, this is what they set out to do: scrutinizing the data to find out how much African livelihoods really improved.

The results are encouraging and sobering. The poverty rate has come down substantially and plausibly even more so than the available poverty estimates have led us to believe. That said, more people are poor today than in 1990 and the human development challenges remain enormous. As expectations are rising and the world gears up towards eradicating extreme poverty by 2030, Africa is bound to be increasingly at the center of this global poverty agenda.

Poverty rates are down, but many more people are poor than in 1990<sup>7</sup>[...] inequality has been increasing in about the same number of countries in which it is falling. That said, the survey data do not capture the extreme wealthy, whose number and share of the economy has been increasing. Despite this generally good news, given rapid population growth, many more people are poor today than in 1990 (under the most optimistic scenario about 330 million in 2012, compared with 280 million in 1990). Looking forward, predictions indicate that the world’s \$1.90-day-poor will be increasingly concentrated in Africa, even if the average 1995–2014 growth rates are maintained. Progress is recorded in other sectors: life expectancy at birth, for example, rose 6.2 years, the number of chronically malnourished children under five

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7 According to the latest World Bank estimates, the share of people living on less than \$1.90 a day fell from 57% in 1990 to 43% in 2012. But only 27 out of the 48 countries had two or more comparable surveys during this period to estimate this trend (Beegle & Christiaensen, 2015).

years old declined by six percentage points, and the number of deaths from politically motivated violence dropped substantially. (Beegle & Christiaensen, 2015)

Impressive as these facts are, the levels of achievement remain low, and worrisomely, the rate of progress is leveling off, especially the lack of progress in educational achievement, which calls for serious attention. More than two out of five adults are still unable to read or write. These facts challenge any ambition for industrialization and structural transformation. In addition, fragile countries tend to perform worse than other countries. The data also confirms the resource-curse theory<sup>8</sup>: for those who reside in a resource-rich country in which the share of national wealth from extractives increases – human development outcomes get worse. The study concludes that ‘better data lead to better decisions and better lives in that that which is not properly measured is not on the policy radar’ (Beegle & Christiaensen, 2015).

“You can’t eat GDP growth” (Norbrook, Orderson, Jobson, & Ware, 2014). After the 2013 oil crisis, the perspective of powerful characters like Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), seems to have gotten more cautious, with the narrative shifting ‘From *Africa rising* to *Africa watching*’ (Blas & England, 2014; England, 2015). At the same time, less subtle detractors to the Africa rising narrative went as far as defining it a ‘myth’ (Broadberry & Gardner, 2013; Carbone, 2015; Rowden, 2013).

There is common accord about the fact that, after decades of unsatisfying performances, economic growth took off in many sub-Saharan states at the beginning of the 21st century. The drivers of growth include an improvement in overall political stability in the continent and a favorable trend of international commodity prices for Africa’s key exports. Nonetheless, a number of scholars point out some important weaknesses in this narrative, for example the absence of manufacturing, or the controversial role of aid in African economies (Moyo, 2011; Rowden, 2013).

Rick Rowden denounces how free market economics has come to advise poor countries to stick with their current primary agriculture and extractives industries and ‘integrate’ into the global economy as they are. Furthermore, this apparently positive phase of growth is now being

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8 See also (Stevens, Lahn, & Kooroshy, 2015; Summerbell, 2016).

challenged by two destabilizing factors: the end of the commodity cycle<sup>9</sup> and the rise of jihadist violence. The extremely low diversification that characterizes the majority of African economies implies that they remain highly dependent on a few commodity exports and thus vulnerable to the fluctuations of the latter's international prices<sup>10</sup>.

The end of the commodity super-cycle is being felt across the continent. The collapse in the price of iron ore is making the recovery efforts of Ebola-stricken Liberia and Sierra Leone more difficult. The economic slowdown in China, which accounts for over 40 per cent of global demand for copper, led commodity corporations to suspend mining operations in Zambia. The enthusiasm of international investors for coal mining in Mozambique cooled off considerably, while the oil price drop is jeopardising developments in countries such as Uganda, where petroleum was recently discovered. (Carbone, 2015, p. 114)

Yet, sub-Saharan economies are not a homogeneous lot. Some of them are more diversified than others are and they do not all export the same primary goods. Some do not have any major extractives to exploit. This diversity implies that what is an export for some African states can be an import for others. In most cases for example, oil is primarily an import rather than an export, meaning that they are essentially benefiting from the reduction of the oil price. Ultimately, not all of Africa's commodity prices fell in the same way.

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9 Compared to short-term price fluctuations, commodity super-cycles span longer periods of time (i.e. complete cycles last 20-70 years) and to involve a broad range of commodities, typically inputs for the industrial development and urbanization of emerging economies (Erten & Ocampo, 2013).

10 The commodity super-cycle that began in 2000 and now appears to be ending saw commodity prices more synchronized than in the past. The rise and fall of the oil price – which surged from \$25 per barrel in January 2000 to \$133 in July 2008, and then dropped from \$108 in June 2014 to \$47 in January 2015 – is thus only the tip of the iceberg. Between 2000 and 2008, the price of iron ore also quintupled, copper quadrupled, cocoa and rice tripled and coffee doubled (the price of cotton, on the other hand, only increased by 63 per cent). This comprehensive trend was abruptly reversed from around mid-2014, as iron ore went down by 47 percent, copper by 20 per cent, and cotton by 25 per cent between June 2014 and January 2015. As much as commodity exports played a key role in fuelling Africa's post-2000 growth performances, the decline in their values is bound to have an opposite impact (Carbone, 2015, p. 113).

The second risk is represented by political instability, particularly in the form of terrorism. As Carbone notes, weak states offers would-be terrorists and insurgents the opportunity to mount serious challenges against central governments. The limits of post-colonial state-building processes in Africa are known.

Many sub-Saharan countries failed to develop well-functioning state administrations capable of establishing order within national territories and implementing public policies for their people. More than fifty years after their independence, African countries such as Somalia, the Central African Republic, Chad or Congo-Kinshasa – as well as the continent's youngest nation, namely South Sudan – typically crowd the bottom end of all international rankings of state effectiveness around the world. Nations as diverse as Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mauritania or even Nigeria are often found not far above them.

After decades of violence between the 1980's and 1990's, Africa witnessed a temporary period of relative peace at the turn of the century<sup>11</sup>, which unfortunately did not coincide with a reduction of the fragility of its states, which remained a concern for most Sub Saharan countries. In fact, since 2009, the greater Horn of Africa region (Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan) led the way, while the Arab Spring of 2011 indirectly contributed to the destabilization parts of the sub-Saharan area, particularly in the Sahel region.

The continued feebleness of state infrastructures, legitimacy and territorial control soon fed into a new generation of violent conflicts. Religion is part of this new picture more than it has ever been in the history of independent Africa. Jihadist struggles, in particular, have been on the rise over

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11 The overall decline in conflicts did not mean that the new century was free from fresh crises. New hotspots emerged as early as 2003 with the Darfur (Sudan) war, followed by the spread of violence in places such as Ivory Coast and later Mali, north-eastern Nigeria, the Central African Republic and South Sudan (Carbone, 2015, p. 118).

recent years, with over a dozen states facing some form of it in a vast area with permeable national borders that stretches from Mauritania to Tanzania. (Carbone, 2015, p. 120)

Nonetheless, Carbone concludes by pointing out how, despite the fact that lower commodity prices and growing political instability are no longer just ‘risks’, but an actual trend<sup>12</sup> under way that is negatively affecting today’s reality in sub-Saharan Africa, the IMF and the World Bank expect a relatively stable 5.3 per cent average performance projected between 2017-2020. Yet, others believe that the mere presence of GDP growth and an increase in trade volumes are not euphemisms for successful economic development, and that increased growth and trade are not development.

If an African country like Malawi achieves higher GDP growth rates and increased trade volumes, this does not mean that manufacturing and services as a percent of GDP have increased over time. Malawi may have earned higher export earnings for tea, tobacco, and coffee on world markets and increased exports, but it is still largely a primary agricultural economy with little movement towards the increased manufacturing or labor-intensive job creation that are needed for Africa to ‘rise.’ (Rowden, 2013)

To those who drew a parallel between Africa and Asia, they offer several indicators that offer a more precise picture of how well Africa is developing (or not).

We can look at whether manufacturing has been increasing as a percentage of GDP, or whether the manufacturing value added (MVA) of exports has been rising. In these cases the comparison between Africa and East Asia is actually quite revealing — as demonstrated by a recent U.N. report that paints a far less flattering picture of Africa’s development prospects. It finds that, despite some improvements in a few countries, the bulk of African countries are either stagnating or moving backwards when it comes to industrialization. The share of MVA in Africa’s GDP fell from 12.8 percent in 2000 to 10.5 percent in 2008, while in devel-

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12 One key consequence is a substantial slowdown in the region’s economic growth trajectory, as testified by a 1.8 per cent downward revision in the IMF’s growth forecasts for 2015-2016 (from 5.9 per cent to 4.1 per cent annual average). Yet according to prevailing growth projections, the ‘rising Africa’ trajectory on the whole is being slowed down but not entirely derailed by current difficulties.

oping Asia it rose from 22 percent to 35 percent over the same period. There has also been a decline in the importance of manufacturing in Africa's exports, with the share of manufactures in Africa's total exports having fallen from 43 percent in 2000 to 39 percent in 2008. In terms of manufacturing growth, while most have stagnated, 23 African countries had negative MVA per capita growth during the period 1990 – 2010, and only five countries achieved an MVA per capita growth above 4 percent.

The report also finds that Africa remains marginal in global manufacturing trade. Its share of global MVA has actually fallen from an already paltry 1.2 percent in 2000 to 1.1 percent in 2008, while developing Asia's share rose from 13 percent to 25 percent over the same period. In terms of exports, Africa's share of global manufacturing exports rose from 1 percent in 2000 to only 1.3 percent in 2008. Africa is also losing ground in labor-intensive manufacturing: Its share of low-technology manufacturing activities in MVA fell from 23 percent in 2000 to 20 percent in 2008, and the share of low-technology manufacturing exports in Africa's total manufacturing exports dropped from 25 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2008. Finally, Africa remains heavily dependent on natural resources-based manufacturing, which is an indication of both its low level of economic diversification and low level of technological sophistication in production. The share of resource-based manufactures in Africa's total manufacturing exports declined only slightly in recent years, from 52 percent in 2000 to 49 percent by 2008. In East Asia and the Pacific, the number dropped to as low as 13 percent by 2008. (Ibid.)

As former Ghanaian presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo warned, “30 years ago, some African nations, beginning with Ghana and Uganda, implemented liberal economic reforms to stop their economic decline. In many cases we opened our markets to global competition when, beyond the extractive industries, we had nothing to compete with. So while the continent's share of global foreign direct investment projects has improved steadily over the past decade, much of this investment has reinforced the structural deficits of our economies” (Akufo-Addo, 2012).

Today many African countries need to use industrial policies, such as temporary trade protection, subsidized credit, and publically supported R&D with technology and innovation policies, if they are ever to get their manufacturing sectors off the ground. (Rowden, 2013)

To observers like Rowden and Carbone, the substantial failure of sub-Saharan countries to initiate processes of structural economic transformation and their apparent inability to consolidate historically fragile states are both indicators that Africa's rise has still much to make up for. Rowden particularly individuates in the lack of industrialization policies the main cause of such condition, but partially shifts the blame from African governments and calls out international trade organizations for their role in this situation. He argues that, today, African countries should use industrial policies, such as temporary trade protection, subsidized credit, and publically supported R&D with technology and innovation policies, to get their manufacturing sectors off the ground. Just like as it happened in the past in the U.K. and other nations that have industrialized successfully. However, according to today's ideology of free trade and free markets, many of these policies are condemned as 'bad government intervention.' 'Bilateral and multilateral aid donors advise against them (and structure loan conditions accordingly). WTO agreements and new regional free trade agreements (FTAs), as well as bilateral investment treaties (BITs) between rich and poor countries, often outlaw them (Ibid.). He admits that there have been some cases in the past where industrial policies have misfired in developing countries, but believes that the reason why these policies worked so well in the United States, Europe and East Asia while failed in Africa and elsewhere is that 'between the 1950's to the 1970's, particularly in Africa and Latin America<sup>13</sup>, many industrial policies failed because they were used inappropriately, with poor sequencing, and were often driven by political considerations or corruption rather than economic analyses or strict efficiency grounds' (A.R.I., 2012; Borg, 2015). Some nations are in fact increasingly rebelling against such constraints. Coalitions of developing countries within

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13 In Latin America, often the industrial policies were kept in place too long, and were too inwardly focused on small domestic markets, neglecting the need to develop international competitiveness. In contrast, the political economies of East Asian countries included institutions that tended to enforce stricter rules for which industries got subsidies and trade protection, and which got cut off from them when they failed to meet performance targets. They also adopted a more outward orientation in their industrialization strategies (Rowden, 2013).

the WTO are asking for more time to implement trade liberalization and for broader exemptions to increase tariffs when their domestic agriculture or manufacturing industries are threatened by floods of cheaper imports. The problem of the lack of necessary 'policy space' was noted in a recent report by the Africa Progress Panel, chaired by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Panel expresses concerns about the European Union's proposed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which seeks to make access for African goods into the European Union markets conditional on Africa eliminating, or lowering tariffs on 80 per cent of imports from the European Union, which would further weaken African domestic industries.

Though African countries desperately need the policy space to adopt industrial policies, the rich countries are pushing loan conditions and trade and investment agreements that block them from doing so, all the while proffering a happy narrative about 'the rise of Africa.' The very idea of industrialization has been dropped from the official development agenda. (Ibid.)

Rowden ultimately points out how, despite the important gains in services industries and per capita incomes, Africa is still not rising, and services alone will not create enough jobs to absorb the millions of unemployed youth in Africa's growing urban areas. Carbone also shares this opinion, and adds a few points about what could be done to improve on the current situation:

1. The high-growth trajectory followed in recent years by 'emerging Africa' is being negatively affected by the downturn of commodity prices as well as, much more moderately, by a rise of jihadist violence in parts of the region.
2. Oil-exporting countries have been particularly hard hit by the oil price collapse and by the consequent deterioration of their terms-of-trade.
3. On the whole, however, growth prospects remain fairly robust. Frontier markets in the region continue to offer important opportunities for trade and investments, although more caution is needed.
4. There is an increasing need to monitor and discriminate among the risks and opportunities in individual countries: while most countries face mounting challenges, some economies are as or even more attractive than in the past. Ethi-



opia, Kenya and Mozambique are among the most promising sub-Saharan markets. The three largest economies in the region are all under pressure, if to a different degree: this is particularly the case for South Africa (slow growth), but also for Nigeria and Angola (slowing down). Other markets are projected to expand at faster paces, including the Ivory Coast, the Congo-Kinshasa and post-Ebola Guinea.

5. A close re-assessment of the potential of emerging Africa's high-growth sectors (e.g. consumer goods, infrastructure, natural resources, agriculture, banking, ICTs, tourism) is required that takes into account the extent to which each of them is being affected by the evolving economic and political circumstances.

6. African countries need to take stock of the 'new normal' of lower prices. With the support of international donors, they should increase efforts to vigorously promote economic diversification, which remains key to reducing vulnerability to terms-of-trade shocks. Ensuring a reliable and affordable provision of electricity, for example, is key to the development of non-oil sectors in Nigeria, the continent's largest economy.

7. Public spending needs adjusting to contain deficit and debt increases: efforts to increase domestic revenues must be stepped up – also by making tax payments easier, providing incentives for tax compliance and reaching the informal sector – and priority must be given to spending for social needs and for economic diversification purposes.

8. Africa needs to return to the path towards increased political stability that characterized the beginning of the 21st century. Political stabilization requires the consolidation of fragile states, which in turn must be nurtured by both good governance and inclusive economic growth.

9. Old and new conflicts must be addressed by tackling their root-causes, not just through security initiatives. Meeting the expectations of marginalized regional communities or of increasing numbers of young people, in particular, is key to the stabilisation of areas such as Nigeria, Mali, Somalia or

Kenya's coastal regions. Inclusive growth has rightly taken centre stage in the development strategies of several African governments.

10. The governments of advanced economies and multilateral organisations should support the processes of economic development and political stabilisation in sub-Saharan countries by promoting trade and investments in the region as well as by sustaining African initiatives for improving and stabilizing accountable and effective governance. (Carbone, 2015, pp. 133–5)

'African cities don't work' or are sometimes more generously defined as 'works in progress, exceedingly creative and extremely stalled' (Simone, 2004, p. 1). Joining a number of other authors such as Myers, Pieterse and Parnell, Simone advocates towards focusing scholars' attention on *how* these cities work, rather than how we think they *should* work.

Africa and its cities are often associated with the idea of crisis (Myers, 2011, p. 3). This tendency ranges across different fields of study, from urban studies to political science. Mamadou Diouf stresses how 'the most commonly used notion to characterize the African city is that of *crisis*' (Diouf, 2007, p. 95). The crisis to which he refers is not only a physical crisis, but also a crisis of the models and the tools through which the continent's urban areas have been traditionally addressed.

Sanitation, urban congestion, access to land, basic services like clean water, electricity and sewers are among the biggest concerns about contemporary emerging cities. As Mike Davis warns about in his *Planet of Slums*, the African situation is 'the most extreme, with its slums growing at twice the speed of the continent's exploding cities' (Davis, 2007, p. 18). This type of alarmist narrative has been predominant in the assessment of the state of African cities. As Myers points out, Davis uses data showing the disparity in the percentages of slum dwellers between developing and developed countries 'without any critical discussion of where these data come from or what really constitutes a slum. Having spent two decades studying Tanzanian cities, I cannot fathom how one would conclude that more than nine out of ten urban Tanzanians live in 'slums', if slums are equated with the goulsh belching squalor Davis portrays" (Myers, 2011, p. 6). Ten years later, the World Bank Report (2017) about the state of contemporary African cities (one of the main sources of references for data and policy cited in scientific literature), is

still introduced by stating how “African cities are crowded, disconnected, and costly” and of how Africa should “open its doors to the world” (Lall et al., 2017, p. 10). As illustrated in the previous chapter, it is obvious how this type of narratives serve specific purposes, which go far beyond the best interests of African cities (whatever this blurry categorization might represent, which is explored in chapter 2.1.3).

Relatively recent developments in analytical methods have been developed to underpin evidence-based policy making, resulting in the creation of instruments that are able to deal with old and new issues, including slum upgrading schemes, land tenure, titling and regulatory reforms, micro-credit finance, private sector engagement, community driven development, multi-stakeholder alliances, conditional cash transfer programs and other incentive-based approaches. These instruments are based on the use of new analytical and planning tools like happiness and life satisfaction analysis, urban poverty assessments, asset-based policy analysis and longitudinal studies, GIS mapping, impact evaluation, metrics of the investment climates, ICT in public administration and various national, urban and city planning tools. In addition, data and benchmarks have become more important in urban policy making (Annez & Linn, 2010).

### **2.1.2. The African Urban Question**

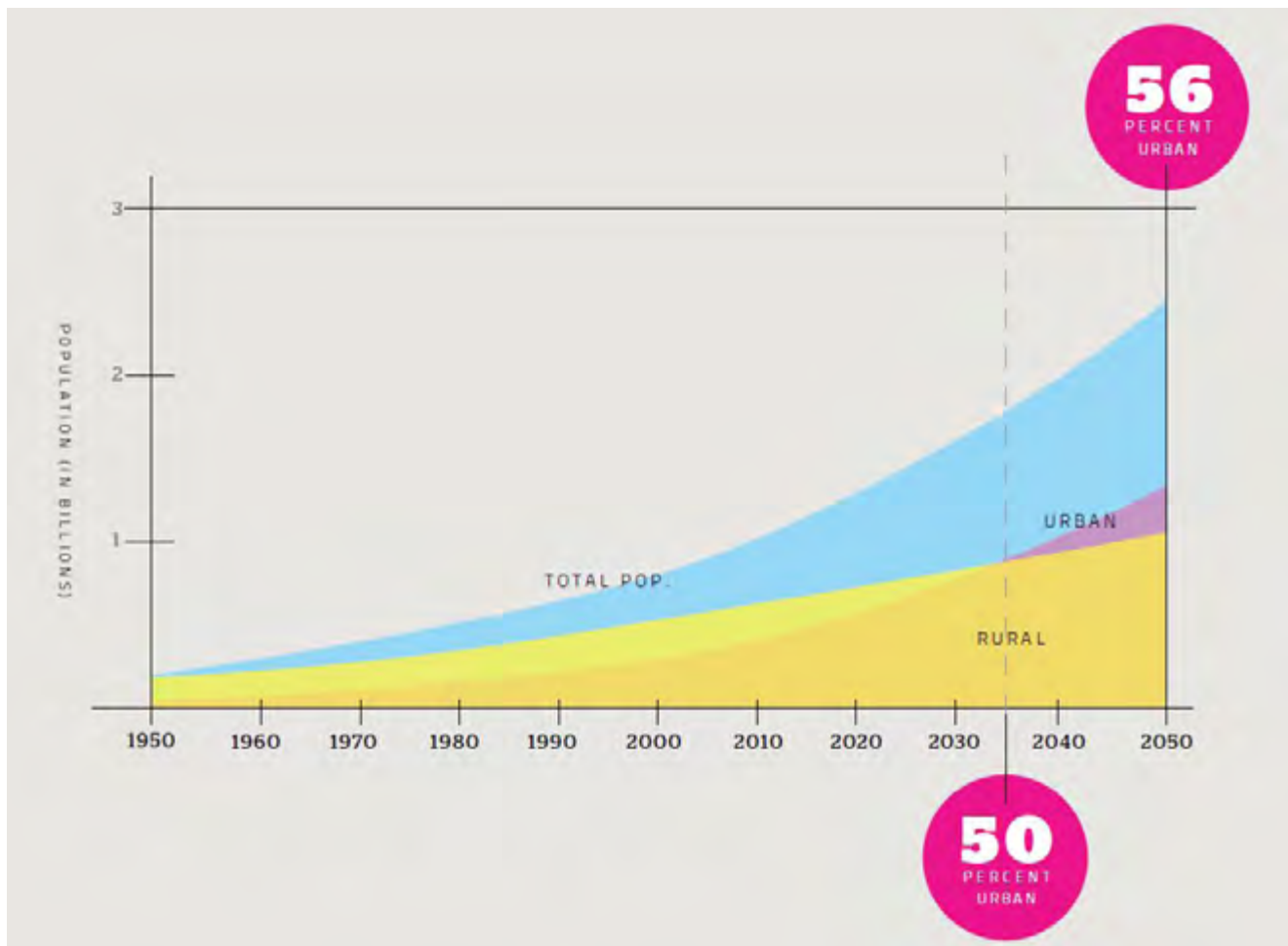
The narratives about African cities, similarly to those describing their continent are often black or white: crisis or opportunity. African cities catalyze the world’s attention because of the unprecedented urbanization rates that they showed throughout the past decades, as indicated by official sources like the World Bank and the United Nations (Cartwright, 2015). This urban boom is commonly seen either as an opportunity (Manuel & Calderon, 2015), or as a threat (Davis, 2007), but both positions agree on the premise that African cities are witnessing high urbanization rates.

Recently, the very figures of this urbanization have come under scrutiny from a third perspective, with a number of researchers calling for a review of the previous approaches and the shift towards more accurate methodologies for their evaluation (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008; Potts, 2012). While the challenges that such growth implies are undeniable in terms of the amount of investment that they will require in the fields

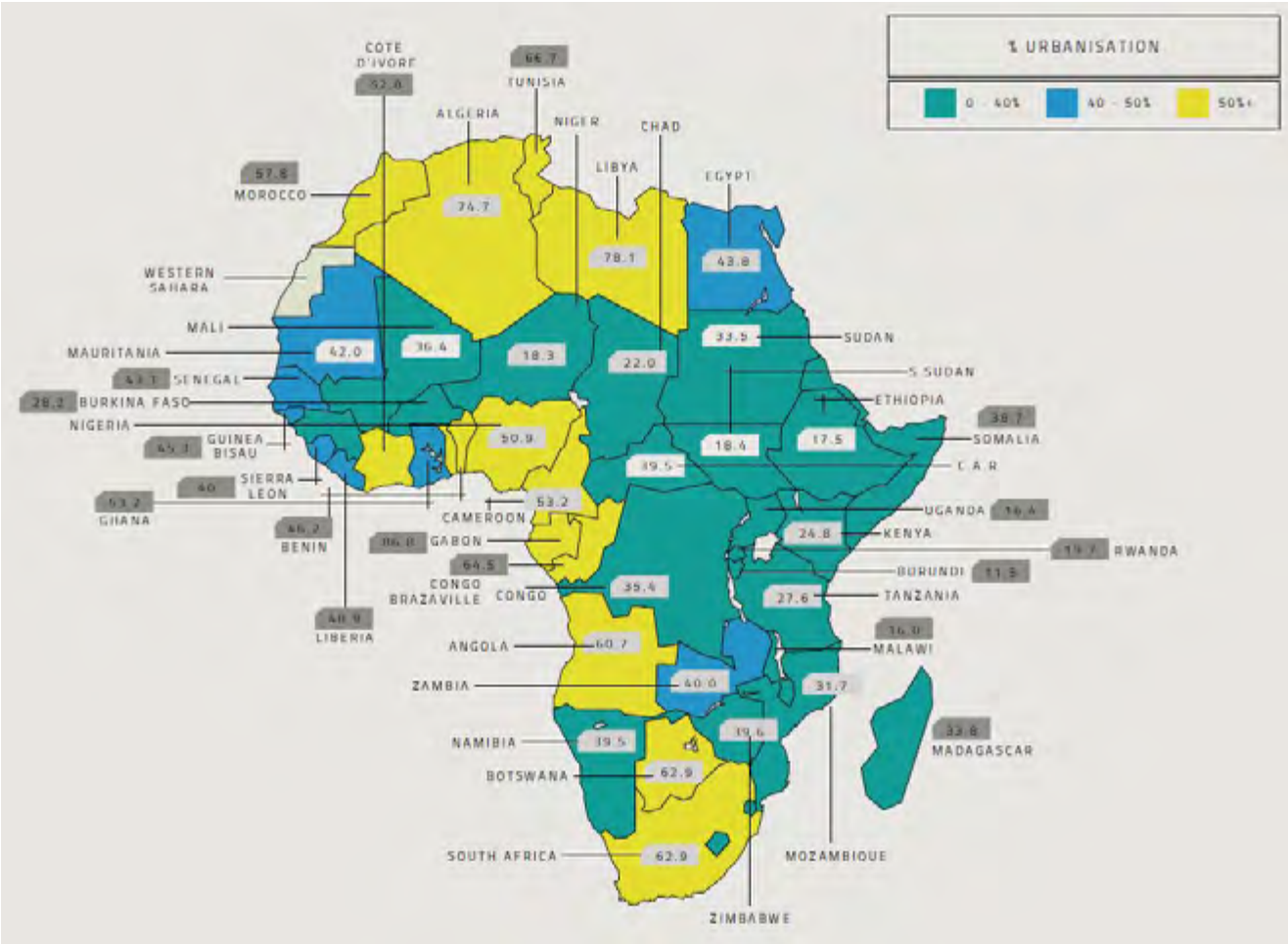
of sanitation, land management and infrastructure (Cohen, 2006), its economic benefits for the lower classes and the much-awaited advent of the African middle class remain yet to be demonstrated ('Few and far between,' 2015; Kuo, 2015; Maritz, 2014). A more accurate estimation of the figures upon which these narratives are constructed would ultimately benefit both sides, as they all acknowledge the lack of reliable data as one of the main obstacles to the continent's development.

Today, the question of urbanization, and the opportunities and challenges that it presents, seems to be as open as ever, with some authors questioning the very 'urban age' paradigm itself (Brenner & Schmid, 2014), noting that there is actually 'no global standard for the definition of urban environment' (Cohen, 2006, p. 65). The approaches to the subject – particularly when dealing with African cities – have been the most varied, but from Barney Cohen's investigation for broad patterns of spatial change (2006) to Laurent Fourchard's socio-historical approach (2011), the point remains that today, as data stands to show, cities are home to nearly half of the world's population. Furthermore, it is expected that over the next 30 years, most of the two-billion-plus person increase in global population will occur in urban areas in the developing world, and this is a compelling subject for urban research. At the London School of Economics, some ask whether urbanization in Sub Saharan Africa is divorced from economic growth, contesting the trend that regards economic development as the main driver of urbanization (Namasaka & Kamaru, 2015). Nonetheless, it is undisputable that a significant departure from the spatial distribution of population growth in the developing world occurred over the past 30 years. The level of world urbanization today and the number and size of the world's largest cities are unprecedented. At the beginning of the twentieth century, just 16 cities in the world – mostly located in advanced, industrialized countries – contained a million people or more. Today, almost 400 cities contain a million people or more, and about seventy percent of them are found in the developing world (Cohen, 2006).

As Cohen notes, if well managed, cities offer important opportunities for economic and social development, having always been focal points for economic growth, innovation, and employment. Capital cities are where the vast majority of modern productive activities are concentrated, and where the vast majority of paid employment opportunities are located. Cities are also centers of modern living, where female labor



**Actual and projected demographic changes in Africa, 1950-2050.**  
 United Nations (2014) World Urbanization Prospects. The 2014 Revision. New York: The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



**Percentage of urban population per country across African regions.**

African Economic Outlook, Demographic statistics, 2014 and UN-Habitat (2014): State of African Cities Report. Nairobi, UN-Habitat.

force participation is greatest and where indicators of general health and wellbeing, literacy, women's status, and social mobility are typically highest. Finally, cities are also important social and cultural centers that house museums, art galleries, film industries, theaters, fashion houses, and other important cultural centers. High population density implies lower per capita cost for infrastructure and basic services. Furthermore, despite the high rates of urban poverty, urban residents on average enjoy better access to education and health care, as well as other basic public services such as electricity, water, and sanitation than people in rural areas (Ibid.). Price Waterhouse Coopers identifies eight main drivers behind urban development and investment: Africa's young demographic; industrialization; commodities exports; infrastructure; international partnerships and government policies; the growth of pension funds, banks, and local stock exchanges; new technologies and architecture sustainability (PwC, 2015).

Nevertheless, as cities grow, their management becomes increasingly complex. The speed and sheer scale of the urban transformation of the developing world presents formidable challenges (Yankson & Bertrand, 2012). Rapid urban growth throughout the developing world has seriously outstripped the capacity of most cities to provide adequate basic services for their citizens. To deal with these challenges, accurate projections of future urban growth based on both a solid foundation of high-quality statistics and a good understanding of the likely patterns and trends of urban change are required.

Whether the urbanization glass is seen as half empty or half-full, there is universal agreement among those who deal with urbanization in developing countries that it presents a set of issues that development practitioners and researchers need to grapple with urgently, if an inevitable and key development challenge/opportunity is to be met in the coming decades. (Annez & Linn, 2010, p. 2)

In their analysis of contemporary urbanization research issues Annez and Lynn also found out how, while all authors analyzed called for improvements in data and on the need to scale up successful interventions in the urban area rather than just moving from one innovative pilot to the next, none of the authors called for more analysis of and justification of the importance of urbanization process for growth, development and poverty reduction. The authors conclude that although it might be ex-

pected that urban experts take the importance of their field for granted, it is nonetheless a meaningful indicator of the priorities of contemporary urban research, which seem to be shifting away from overly general debate, to instead focus on the real potentials and challenges that contemporary cities present (Annez & Linn, 2010).

The traditional challenges individuated in the reports on the urbanization of developing countries were slums, urban land management, housing finance and the role of the investment climate. Nowadays, the focus at the forefront of urban analysis or policy has shifted to other challenges such as poverty and inequality, women rights, crime and insecurity, governance and the political economy of urban issues, which include urban employment and labor markets, urban transport and the future of small and medium-size cities.

In the contemporary urban studies landscape, the role of cities in Africa is source of great interest and debate (Perrot & Malaquais, 2009). Some, like the documentary *Afripedia*, showcase the strengths and chaos of an urbanizing Africa, and see the challenges posed by urbanization as a powerful tool for self-identity (Sturgis, 2015).

Africa's urbanization is something other than what its planners, leaders, or theorists had intended it to be. (Brennan, 2013, p. 37)

In *Afripedia* (Stocktown, 2015), we see how young urbanites thrive on this idiosyncratic trajectory. The film follows entrepreneurs and artists from five cities – Nairobi, Johannesburg, Abidjan, Accra, and Luanda. A common theme emerges: African cities are exposing the world to a new narrative about a continent long anchored by stereotypes of poverty and provincialism. ‘Angola is very, very exciting,’ explains musician Nástio Mosquito in the film. ‘This is what we’re seeing – development,’ he says, overlooking a skyline dotted with newly built skyscrapers. Indeed, it might sound surprising, but in 2015, Luanda, Angola’s capital, was classified among the most expensive cities in the world, with a two-bedroom apartment’s rent costing 6,800\$ per month (Vanham, 2015). Angola, Cameroon, Rwanda, Namibia, Uganda, are all countries whose urban reality might surprise anyone who has only heard of these countries only in terms of crisis and emergency (Douglas, 2015). Both Kigali, Rwanda, and Windhoek, Namibia, in 2016 saw the completion of the first 6-Green Star certified buildings



In scientific literature, Murray and Myers suggest that we should move beyond the ‘diagnostic mindset’ that looks at African cities only as examples of failed urbanism (Murray & Myers, 2006, p. 7). Instead, it is imperative to turn to appreciate the local specificities of each city, trying to understand ‘how they make themselves and at the same time they are made’ (Simone, 2004, pp. 15–16). Focusing on crisis narratives has demonstrated to be a not particularly productive approach. Instead of focusing on the myriad of things that ‘don’t work by Western standards’ in African cities, we could ‘start to critically assess how cities in Africa actually work’ and elaborate new strategies accordingly (Murray & Myers, 2006, p. 7).

Artistic and journalistic initiatives like *Afripedia* give a hint of the great potential of cities in Africa, but this potential is both cultural and economic. Trevor Manuel<sup>14</sup> and Felipe Calderón<sup>15</sup>, are positive – albeit cautious – about the future of Africa’s urbanization. While acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead, they maintained a fairly optimistic view of what is to come for the continent and its ‘rapidly growing’ urban areas (Manuel & Calderon, 2015). They see great potential in the payoff of the successful assimilation of new urban residents: labor is generally more productive in cities, and the concentration of people in urban spaces generates markets and economies of scale in the delivery of services. The hope is that Africa’s commodity-driven economies can reap the same urban dividend that Europe, North and South America, and East Asia did during their respective urbanization phases. Positive signals come also from a number of cities, with investment in public transportation, like the recent completion of the first metro line in Addis Ababa (Appiah, 2015; The Economist, 2015b). Given that so much of Africa’s urban environment is yet to be built, the continent has a unique opportunity to get it right the first time, establishing itself as a world leader in high-productivity, low-carbon development, supported by recent technological innovations. A shift in that direction has already begun, with African cities finding cost-effective, environmentally friendly solutions to critical challenges:

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14        Former Finance Minister of South Africa and former Chair of the South African Planning Commission.

15        Former President of Mexico, and Chair of the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate.

Confronted with chronic electricity shortages and under-resourced state-owned energy utilities, a growing number of households, companies, and governments have embraced independent and local power producers capable of meeting demand for energy quickly. M-KOPA Solar, for example, has expanded rapidly across East Africa, with its pay-as-you-go service aimed at off-grid households – households that are tired of depending on unsafe, overpriced, and unreliable energy sources like kerosene, batteries, and generators. Similar progress is being made in improving mobility. Although only 6% of Africans own cars, the continent's urban infrastructure has long been overwhelmed. In Lagos, for example, commuters collectively lost three billion hours per year to traffic congestion from 2007 to 2009. Nevertheless, recent investment in bus-oriented transport infrastructure, with dedicated lanes for environmentally friendly mass-transit vehicles, has improved the situation considerably. Similar programs are currently being implemented in at least nine other African cities. (Manuel & Calderon, 2015)

As Manuel and Calderon stress, local governments have a great responsibility over the condition of their cities. 'The continent's local authorities are often contested, inadequately supported by national governments, and still grappling with the basic processes of defining boundaries, installing governance structures, and communicating with their constituents. As a result, they are not yet able to conduct asset inventories, oversee land-tenure systems, or marshal adequate financial resources. Adding to this, there is the perspective of further challenges deriving from the forecasts about climate change<sup>16</sup>, which is expected to take a toll, especially in the global South' (Ibid.). Nonetheless, these future challenges also represent an opportunity (Cartwright, 2015) Research from the New Climate Economy has shown that low-carbon cities could save \$17 trillion globally by 2050 (Ibid.). With so much of Africa's urban environment to be built in the next 30 years, its cities stand to secure much of this saving. In addition to this, when scaled, service delivery has the potential to generate virtuous cycles of fiscal efficiency, employment, risk reduction, and increased competitiveness in a climate-sensi-

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16 Climate change is already affecting the availability of food and water, contributing to the spread of diseases. It is estimated that soon, Africa's urban infrastructure – already strained by rapid population growth – will be feeling the effects. Responding to climate change could cost the continent as much as \$50 billion per year by 2050 (Manuel & Calderon, 2015).

tive global economy. Deloitte (Deloitte, 2013) estimates that, while in 2010 Africa had 51 cities with more than a million inhabitants, and only one city – Cairo – with more than 10 million, by 2040 it is expected to have more than 100 cities of more than one million inhabitants and seven cities of more than 10 million.

The largest of these cities is projected to be Kinshasa, where the population is expected to reach 24 million by 2040. These pressures are already being felt and in a bid to cope with this rising urbanisation, entire new cities are already being developed such as Tatu City in Kenya, the City of Light in Accra and King City in Takoradi, Ghana accommodating 178,000 residents between them and being built at the cost of US\$300 million. In Nigeria, there is the Greater Port Harcourt City and the modern Eko Atlantic City being built on reclaimed sea.

These 'self-contained' new cities, based on the work-play-live concept, are intended to relieve the highly congested metropolises and minimise the need for inhabitants to go into the 'centre'. Indeed, demand for housing is growing across all price points. In Nairobi, for example, there is a demand for some 150,000 affordable new homes per annum at the lower end of the price spectrum, but with only some 30,000 units being built annually. Ghana, sits with a 1.6 million units housing deficit which is anticipated to grow to 3.6 million units by the year 2022 according to the Consumer Protection Agency of Ghana. (Ibid.)

While many countries in Africa have traditionally not had a developed mortgage market, this is changing as banks and specialized financial institutions are rolling out new programs such as lower-income mortgages.

Ghanaians, for example, are now able to more easily access 15-year mortgages for 18,000 cedis (US\$9,245) and this is, in turn, creating opportunities for developers. (Ibid.)

Strong growth and resultant shortages of office space: As more businesses access African opportunities and set up local operations, the acute shortage of high quality, well-priced office space is being exposed. The attempt to answer for such growing demand without the necessary regulations and skills has led to catastrophic results, with buildings collapsing and the loss of many lives (African Centre for Cities, 2012; Hamilton, 2012; Mugarula, 2015; NewsGhana, 2014). On the commercial front, office rentals on many parts of the continent are high commensurate to

the quality on offer. Business activity emanating from the oil and gas industry has further pushed rentals higher, making Luanda and Lagos some of the costliest cities in the world to live and operate in. In a 2012 cost of living survey, Luanda ranked as the second most expensive city in the world for expatriates. Lagos was ranked at number 39. To put this into context, Tokyo is the most expensive at number one, just one place ahead of Luanda, while Paris ranked 37, Stockholm 46 and Vienna 48. Luanda rentals can be in the range of US\$150 per square meter per month and Lagos US\$70. The rise of the African middle class, as a percentage of the population, has been steady:

In 1980, 111 million or 26% of the continent's population fell in this category rising to 151.4 million or 27% of the population in 1990 with a further surge to 196 million in 2000 and a dramatic increase to 313 million in 2010, equating to 34.3% of the population. The rise in absolute numbers, compared to the percentage rise, has been more dramatic and this is best explained by the increase in population, with Africa having hit the 1 billion-population mark in 2010. (Ibid.)

The prime beneficiaries of this socio-economic trend are consumer businesses and, primarily, retail – food and clothing. There is currently an explosion of such businesses moving into the continent and with that, a rise in the demand for formal retail infrastructure.

To illustrate the scale of the opportunity, Nigeria is comprised of 36 states under its federal government system. With a population of 160 million, there are opportunities of scale across the country, beyond Lagos. The development of retail space is not happening fast enough and remains a key constraint to retailers' African growth plans. This, in turn, is hampered by insufficient FDI inflows into property. This has now created an opportunity for institutional investors, including African pension funds, which traditionally have not invested in this asset class, but this is changing. (Ibid.)

Many of Africa's 54 countries are small, with populations of fewer than 20 million and economies of less than US\$10 billion. Their infrastructure systems, like their borders, are reflections of the continent's colonial past, with roads, ports, and railroads built for resource extraction and political control, rather than to bind territories together economically or

socially. The essential benefit of regional infrastructure is to make possible the formation of large, competitive markets in place of the present collection of small, isolated, and inefficient ones. As regional bodies and the African Union continue to drive the integration imperative, this is creating opportunities for an array of large infrastructure projects that span borders:

Initiatives such as the North-South Corridor and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Infrastructure Master Plan present massive opportunities for public private partnerships (PPPs). There is recognition that such PPP arrangements could assist governments close material financial, managerial and technical gaps, while supporting further regional integration. For example, there is a US\$100 billion funding gap for the SADC Infrastructure Plan. The North-South Corridor project is equally ambitious and costly. It comprises 157 projects in the North-South Corridor, conceived as the area between Durban and Dar es Salaam, and includes 59 road projects; 38 rail projects and six bridge projects. (Ibid.)

Yet, according to the African Development Bank, poor and insufficient infrastructure remains one of Africa's starkest development challenges:

Despite the continent's sustained growth and rapid urbanisation rates, its infrastructure investment deficit remains staggeringly high: \$50bn annually, according to the African Development Bank. The gap applies mainly to energy, transport, water and sanitation, but the region is also struggling to construct enough education, culture, tourism and healthcare infrastructure for burgeoning populations. This gap impacts Africa's businesses, entrepreneurs, and young people. (Hruby & Jawara III, 2015)

Most economists point out that the extremely limited infrastructural footprint presents a binding constraint to continued and high growth (UNHabitat, 2015). Research has suggested as example the connection between the development of colonial-era railroads with long-term economic development (Kerby, Moradi, & Jedwab, 2014). Infrastructural development surely requires long-term vision and careful planning, but its results have been proven to influence economic activity well after the initial investment. Nonetheless, nowadays in order to increase the pace of critical infrastructure investment, innovative financing mechanisms

must be studied and scaled up. In developed countries a considerable portion of infrastructure funding is sourced locally, but this is rarely the case in Africa. Local banks and pension funds are often liquid in local currency, but few funds are directed towards infrastructure. Most prefer to invest in government bonds or local stock exchanges, because of a lack in the technical expertise needed to assess infrastructure assets. Additionally, interest rates attached to local currency are usually very expensive, particularly given that such funding needs to be in place for several years for the project to be viable and the volatility of local currencies.

Infrastructural development will be focused on cities. Between now and 2050 Africa's urban population will triple. The efficient city is the crucible of growth: it provides connectivity; it enables exporters to cluster, securing the benefits of scale, and proximity to ports or airports for access to markets. It enables workers to live near jobs. It provides a population dense enough to allow local services such as bakeries with markets sufficiently large to support scale and competition. (Collier, 2015)

The rise of other regions can provide insights for Africa's near-term development trajectory. Infrastructure and construction have formed the backbone to China's rapid transformation and if African nations are to follow suit, additional innovative solutions to the challenges of infrastructure finance will be needed.

The problem is not that Africa has a missing class of people but rather a missing class of organisation. The founts of productivity are organisations, such as businesses, that make ordinary people productive by harnessing the potential of scale and specialisation while preserving worker motivation. Africa is short of such organisations: its private sector lacks scale while its public sector lacks motivation. Global businesses, by contrast, perform the alchemy of combining these factors every day. They will be needed in the coming decades for three specific transformations, visible in Nigeria and Ethiopia.

First, Africa needs functioning infrastructure. The model of aid-financed public sector construction and operation has failed. The future is for aid to be used to leverage private investment, rather than substitute for its absence. Appropriately, Britain is now increasing by £735m its funding for CDC,

its vehicle to support private investment in Africa. African leaders see this too. They know they will need global construction companies to build the power stations, grids, railways and ports vital to growth; global utility companies to operate them to international standards; and global private finance to pay for it all. (Collier, 2015)

Investors are eager to tip in, but new financial systems must be elaborated to reassure them about the potential long-term financial risks. The Financial Times cites the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), a Pan-African trade finance multilateral organization headquartered in Cairo as an example. This model has been successfully used in the hotel industry in Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon and Nigeria in partnership with global brands such as Hilton, Raddison and Protea, and in cooperation with financial institutions such as the United Bank for Africa, First Bank of Nigeria and the Nigerian Export Import Bank. Afreximbank has announced plans to apply the same model to the development of hospitals and hopes to use the model in a variety of developments in future, possibly infrastructure.

[Afreximbank] uses a trade finance model that allows for risk sharing in the development and operation of infrastructure between stakeholders. A local financial institution partner funds the construction of the proposed project with local currency. The local bank provides on the ground expertise and helps to ensure global standards. Once the construction has been completed, Afreximbank takes over the loan for a longer period and converts it into US dollars, making the financing more affordable and increasing the economic viability of the project through longer-maturity currency matching and funding costs. (Hruby & Jawara III, 2015)

Afreximbank's work is demonstrating concrete ways in which African entities are paving an innovative path forward, providing African solutions to one of Africa's most pressing problems. Application of this model by other financial entities can scale up the success. Ports, bridges, roads, hospitals and railroads will be part of Africa's future; the faster they are built, the better the development story. Manuel and Calderon highlight the role of African leaders at this stage, since responsible leaders remain the key to tackling the urban challenge.

Success will require that African leaders acknowledge the urbanization trend as an economic and climate-action opportunity, and take the appropriate steps, including creating new funding models and partnerships and adjusting the responsibilities and powers of municipal authorities. In this effort, they should draw on the expertise of bodies that are already active in this area, like the C40<sup>17</sup>, a network of cities that are tackling climate change. In this process, African leaders will undoubtedly confront resistance from their societies' vested interests. But they should press forward anyway. The opportunity that climate-smart urbanization represents is simply too good to be missed. (Manuel & Calderon, 2015)

For Uganda, urbanization is the single largest opportunity in the coming decade. By some estimates, Kampala, Uganda's capital city and largest urban area, already generates about 60% of the country's gross domestic product (Collier & Haas, 2016). Although there has been little strategic growth over the past decades, there is the real opportunity for Kampala to get it right, as two thirds of the city is yet to be built by 2050. To spearhead efforts to support improvements in connectivity, density, and overall urban infrastructure will require new investment and finance. If done well, Kampala could produce much-needed acceleration of productivity and growth by fostering the movement of people towards more productive employment.

Adding to the optimistic narratives, market intelligence companies generally tend to focus on the positive economic implications of Africa's urbanization. In 2010, a report by McKinsey Global Institute estimated that 40 percent of Africans live in urban areas; a portion close to China's and that is continuing to expand. The number of households with discretionary income is projected to rise by 50 percent over the next 10 years, reaching 128 million people. By 2030, the continent's top 18 cities spending power could amount to \$1.3 trillion combined (Leke, Lund, Roxburgh, & Wamelen, 2010). Nowadays, reports are more cautious, but still point in similar directions, as is the case for Ernst & Young's *Africa Attractiveness Survey 2015*, which clearly declares their mission, as to 'provide factual substance to the 'Africa rising' narrative'

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17 C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group is a global network of large cities taking action to address climate change by developing and implementing policies and programs that generate measurable reductions in both greenhouse gas emissions and climate risks. [www.c40.org](http://www.c40.org)



(EY, 2015). This persists despite recent headwinds with the continent's economic expansion projected to be at its slowest in five years – dragged down by the impact of lower oil prices on the Nigerian and Angolan economies and South Africa's sluggish growth. Their report reveals that investor sentiment has softened, and that FDI projects are down for a second consecutive year. 'Yet economic growth across the continent remains resilient. Despite the headwinds, growth in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) will beat the emerging markets average, and be outstripped only by developing Asia. Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Cote d'Ivoire are among 22 economies in SSA that are expected to grow by more than five percent this year' (EY, 2015, p. 2). An interesting fact is that their data shows that, although the number of Foreign Direct Investments<sup>18</sup> (FDI) projects fell in 2015, the value of those projects increased sharply, as did the number of jobs they created. Indeed, the capital value of FDI was, by far, the highest over the past five years.

We do not know yet whether this is sustainable, but it is certainly cause for celebration. This mixed picture is not surprising. It reflects the diversity and complexity of this great continent – there is never a one-size-fits-all answer. Perspective remains important. Ours has been, and remains, a glass-half-full viewpoint. We remain confident that, despite economic headwinds, the 'Africa rising' narrative remains intact and sustainable. However, Africa's future will not take care of itself. Our view is that Africa and its leaders have reached an inflection point: deliberate and urgent choices are required to raise levels of productivity and competitiveness, accelerate structural transformation and make the shift toward an inclusive, sustainable growth path. In this context, we outline five priorities for action that we believe Africa's leaders across business and government should

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<sup>18</sup> With urbanization and GDP growth rates comparable to those of Asian countries, foreign direct investment (FDI) in the continent has seen its peak in the years between 2008 and 2014. Today, the attractiveness of the continent is losing momentum due to political uncertainties and the decrease in commodity prices, with particular regard to the oil industry. Yet, sectors like infrastructure and consumer-facing sectors such as technology, media and telecommunications (TMT), financial services and consumer products and retail (CPR) have been growing steadily, attracting more than 50% of total FDI when combined, followed by real estate, hospitality and construction (RHC) which accounts for about 8% of the total. (EY, 2015).

focus on. In our first edition, we declared, ‘it’s time for Africa!’ Five years on, we now assert, ‘it’s time for Africa’s leaders!’ (EY, 2015, p. 3)

There are some promising signals from an analysis of Nairobi and Cape Town in the sector of information and communications technology (ICT)<sup>19</sup>, which seems to be growing steadily, and has shown signs of being able to generate a fairly distributed amount of wealth across urban centers (Kebede & Kamiya, 2015). Ultimately, the missing link between economic and urban development in Africa seems to be inextricably connected to its lack of industries. As Ferré, Ferreira and Lanjouw point out in their paper ‘Is there a Metropolitan Bias? The inverse relationship between poverty and city size in selected developing countries,’ development has been traditionally associated with industrialization, and industrialization to urbanization (Ferré, Ferreira, & Lanjouw, 2012). What happened in Africa is different, as most African cities growth is not the result of industrialization, but rather of demographic growth, and in some cases of humanitarian and environmental emergencies that have pushed people out of the countryside and into the city (Ibid.). Under such circumstances, a number of studies shows how urban growth becomes disconnected from economic growth (Namasaka & Kamaru, 2015). Despite the fact that even those living in the poorest parts of the cities clearly have better access to services, health care, and education than their counterparts living in rural areas, it seems that the benefits of urban living stop just short of closing the gap between the wealthy and the poor (Fay & Opal, 1999).

Cities in Africa are very much diverse, and the ‘African City’ label has proven ineffective in addressing such heterogeneity. To counter this tendency, authors like AbdouMalik Simone look at what happens ‘in a circumscribed space and time to help prepare specific actors to reach

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19 ICT was chosen ‘because of its transformative possibilities for Africa’s development. ICT is a leading and fast-growing global industry in its own right, as well as a potential catalyst for wider economic development. The digital revolution is not just about consumers owning mobile phones and having cheaper calling rates. Computers and mobile devices are powerful tools, impacting how people save and spend their money, how children learn, how doctors and nurses care for patients, how farmers market their crops, and how commercial firms conduct business and engage with customers and suppliers. Mobile devices, broadband (the technology that enables the high speed transfer of data rather than voice communications) and ICT more generally also create opportunities for businesses to develop new products (including applications and creative content) and access untapped external markets.’ Kebede & Kamiya, 2015, p. 15

and extend themselves across a larger world and enact these possibilities of urban becoming' (Simone, 2004, p. 3). James R. Brennan refers to a "*post-normative* view of African cities, in which urbanization is something other than what its planners, leaders, or theorists had intended it to be," referring to the *normative* 'dualist' view – that African cities represent a separate realm of 'modern' urban life surrounded by 'traditional' countryside – long stood at the center of colonial urban ethnography, and proved remarkably resilient in the decades that followed colonial rule (Brennan, 2013, p. 37). As Brennan emphasizes, whether or not Africa's prospering nations of the 2000's will continue to match optimists' expectations of interconnected economic growth and improved governance as they have over the past decade, there is little question that urban centers will be a moving target for urban analysts, who will seek to keep pace through the rapid and experimental adoption of new methodological and analytical frameworks (Brennan, 2013, p. 38). If the larger story of Africa's urbanization over the past few decades really is 'the comparative impotence or even irrelevance of urban planning, and the emergence of unanticipated heterogeneity,' in addition to the analysis of its idiosyncratic urban modes of livelihood and unexpected forms of associational life identified by authors such as AbdouMalik Simone, it will be increasingly vital to focus on the formation of political power 'in such inchoate and unpredictable spaces' (Brennan, 2013, p. 40). Similarly, Laurent Fourchard has urged historians of African cities to analyze 'the multiple, ambivalent, and non-linear city/state relationships on the continent' as a way of moving beyond normative visions of the state, while 'facilitating the interrogation of this relatively unexplored issue in the analysis of state formation in Africa' opening the way for a more open interpretation of the variety of configurations of African urban environments (Fourchard, 2011, p. 227).

### 2.1.3. The African City Paradox<sup>20</sup>

In the past 25 years, Africa has drawn great attention well beyond the academic world of urban studies. Increase in international demand for commodities, better economic policies, the introduction of new technologies in the fields of IT and communications and ultimately an increase in democracy, political stability and entrepreneurship were all

factors that contributed to catalyze international attention towards the continent (Bonaglia & Wegner, 2014, pp. 45–82). While at the beginning of the 21st century Africa was famously labelled as ‘the hopeless continent’, the following years were characterized by a shift in perspective that instead focused on its growth and attractiveness for foreign capitals. The continent’s development affected its territory in its entirety, and its cities grew and evolved into hubs for financial, commercial and cultural exchange.

The shifting image of a number of Africa’s cities from urban poverty to places of economic opportunity is also changing the perceptions international investors and policy makers have of urban Africa. (Bekker & Fourchard, 2013, p. 2)

In the past decade, there has been a considerable interest in the unusual pace of growth of African cities and this rising attention is demonstrated by many international events and publications around this topic. In 2008, UN-Habitat wrote the first report on the state of African cities underlining the need to «provide both a tool and a platform for debate on urban issues within Africa»<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, in Europe, a number of exhibitions and conferences have been focusing on the African continent; debating the features, the problems, the challenges and the opportunities of African cities.<sup>22</sup> LSE Cities announced that the next prestigious conference of *Urban Age Programme* would be organized in Africa, confirming its increasing interest in the continent.

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21 The structure of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme’s reports remains consistent in 2008, 2010 and 2014 to help readers in collecting data and information. It starts with a description of the current situation of African cities, delineating the framework. The second part explains specific topics and each topic is described within the geographical areas defined (North/ West/ Central/ East/ Southern African cities).

22 The *Triennale di Milano*’s exhibition ‘Africa Big Change Big Chance’ (Albrecht, 2014) has been dedicated to the opportunities and challenges of the huge transition occurring in Africa. In 2015, the exhibition ‘Africa. Architecture, Culture, Identity’ was held in Copenhagen at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Holm, Kallehauge, 2015), while the international conference ‘African cities’ was convened in Turin, organized by *Centro Piemontese Studi Africani*. At the current *Biennale di Venezia*, LSE cities’ conference ‘Shaping Cities’ have seen important scholars taking part at the discussion, but the Africa theme has not been discussed in-depth. (At the 15<sup>th</sup> international architecture exhibition held in Venice, the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016 conference by LSE cities was called ‘Shaping Cities’. Many important scholars took part at this discussion: Saskia Sassen, Mark Swilling, Richard Sennet, AbdouMalik Simone, Rahul Mehrotra, Sue Parnell, among others. Some African examples have been mentioned in the debate: <https://urbanage.lsecities.net/conferences/shaping-cities-venice-2016#updates> ).

Across numerous institutional fields, there is a renewed interest in the emergence of Africa as a significant force in global economic and political matters. At the center of this supposed renaissance is Africa's urban transition. The Monitor Consulting Group argues that the economic future of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is more connected to the success of its cities, and the competitive clusters based there, than to its nation states. Cities today generate most of the subcontinent's wealth, with many thriving despite obvious challenges. Unsurprisingly, this economic upturn can be connected to the beginnings of a cultural flourishing as well. A significant number of African institutions have emerged to take up the challenge of understanding and building a new body of knowledge about the continent. (Tavengwa and Pieterse in Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 456).

Similarly, both informative and scientific literature about Africa have seen a shift in perspective, from so-called Afro-pessimism to Afro-optimism and more recently, realism (Blas & England, 2014; Davies, 2016). In the field of urban studies, cities in Africa have been the subject of a great number of publications. Nonetheless, that of *African cities* remains an elusive concept which often seems to represent a contradiction between the somehow generalist titles of such publications, and their often much more focused and specific content.

This chapter's purpose is to investigate the definitions that a selection of contemporary authors gives of African cities. Its goal is to expose the different themes and perspectives that emerge around the subject in order to verify whether there are some common trends or divergences, and ultimately if it does make sense to talk about African cities or it is just an oversimplification. As Pieterse and Simone state:

The African city remains an elusive mirage clouded by limited data and inadequate theoretical approaches that prevent researchers and urbanists from coming to terms with the immensely complex, but also generative, dynamism of the spatial alchemy that can only be sensed there, or should I say, here. Clearly, for both what we know and do not know,

the African city is indeed an edge, a site of danger, for there are impossibly many dimensions to grasp at once. (Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 33)

The following quotes from a number of authors from different backgrounds well exemplify the contemporary geography of knowledge around African cities and the relative blurriness that subsists around the concept itself. In scientific literature, when it comes to the definition of *African cities* authors seem to adopt similar approaches, and a number of common themes and topics emerge. In general, we have usually noticed a rebuke or at least a relativization of the concept of African cities itself, even in cases where it represented the title of the publication itself. This is the case Myers and his *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*:

The breadth, diversity, and complexity of the continent and its urban areas seem to make it absurd to reductionist to speak of 'the African city,' or even of 'African cities' as my title has, as if there is a type, or even several types that belong to a distinct set[...]and yet over and over again, media voices and scholars alike make exactly this sort of generalizing logic the prevailing mode of thinking about 'Africa' and its cities. (Myers, 2011, p. 2)

Many, like Myers, urge to look at the African city as an *alternative* to the Western model. Serge Latouche wrote about the *degrowth* theory in 2007 and just one year later he proposed the *other* Africa as an alternative solution. According to him, Africa can become the place where to renovate the sustainability promise, failed during the past industrial revolutions. (Latouche & Luquet, 2008). Some went as far as proposing Africa as a *savior* to the West. Robert looked in a different way at African cities, comparing them to «improvised laboratories of cultural forms, languages, music, painting [...]». The African business is a cultural phenomenon, in which creativity has a key role. African industry is based on the industry's waste [...]. The informal could become the post-modernity laboratory.»<sup>23</sup> (Robert, 2006, p. 137).

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23 Quotation from the Italian text: «Le città africane sono laboratori improvvisati di forme culturali, di linguaggio, di musica, di pittura. Impresa africana come fenomeno culturale in cui l'inventiva occupa un grande spazio. L'Africa costruisce la sua industria sugli scarti dell'industria. Esiste una forte cultura del riutilizzo degli oggetti. L'informale potrebbe diventare il laboratorio della post-modernità.». The original title of the book is *L'Africa in soccorso dell'occidente*.

Exploring the connection between the West and African cities, urban historian Bill Freund offers an insightful look back to their evolution. «The very rapid growth of postwar African cities continued and even increased with the coming of independence». Then, «In the middle to late 1970's, modernist Africa for the most part became mire in crisis[...] The cosmopolitan dream turned into a nightmare». As he acknowledged how «African cities generally were unable to progress according to the structures of colonial planning and colonial values.» (Freund, 2007). As Murray explains:

What is striking about cities in Africa is their astonishing diversity and heterogeneity. Though many cities in Africa came into existence as overseas extensions of metropolitan colonial powers seeking to establish beachheads on the African continent, their subsequent growth and development did not conform to a linear logic or uniform pattern. City-building processes that took place under the dominance of European colonialism often left an indelible imprint on the original spatial layout, the built environment, and architectural styles of cities and town in Africa. Yet with the passage of time, these features have sometimes faded into obscurity or been modified beyond recognition. The diversity of cities in Africa is reflected in their dissimilar morphological forms, their distinctive social and demographic compositions, and their varying translocal linkages and connections. (Murray & Myers, 2006, p. 7)

Given their heterogeneity, does it even make sense to talk about *African cities*? Some, like Jerome Chenal, suggest that it is useless to group all African cities together, and the selection should be narrowed-down to more geographically and culturally similar regions: «The city is not global or generic. There is no Northern city or Southern city, but only large groups (when different cities have several aspects in common.» (Jerome Chenal, 2014, p. 3). The urban geographer Susan Parnell and researcher in urban policy Edgar Pieterse<sup>24</sup> were indeed able to delineate some common traits of African cities:

- 1) They are integrally connected to rural areas through the practice of circular migration.
- 2) There is a sponge of the urban fringe or peri-urban edge to them.
- 3) Distinctive is

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24 Both Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse work in the African Centre for Cities (ACC) based in Cape Town.

the phenomenon of urban primacy. Primate cities can overshadow other settlements in political importance and centrality, challenging national power and on occasion making governments reticent about embracing urban issues[...] 4) Predominance of informal modes of urbanization in terms of both social and economic reproduction. African cities are characterized by overlapping and even competing system of power. Learning where power lies in the city can be challenging. 5) Poverty, informality and the absence of a strong local state with a clear and unchallenged mandate to manage the city are arguably the leitmotifs of African urbanism today. (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014, pp. 9–10)

Five years after the African Perspectives 2007 conference ‘Urban Development Stall’ in Delft, a book has been published to summarize the dialogues and to analyze the ‘African perspective’. Pieterse<sup>25</sup> wrote the second chapter taking «for granted a number of assumptions. One, African cities are in permanent state of crisis and as a result are largely marked by almost unfathomable levels of deprivation, cruelty, routine dispossession, and an interminable horizon of sameness or marginal possibility of improvement or adjustment in circumstance. Two, for as long as most sub-Saharan economies remain essentially obsolete in the existing global economic system. Three[...]the overwhelming tendency to use very limited fiscal resources to invest in particular kinds of infrastructures that hold the promise of global connectivity, visibility[...] Such infrastructure adventures tend to further reinforce the deeply unequal and segregated race-economies in African cities.» (Pieterse in Bruyns & Graafland, 2012, p. 51).

Others, like Dominique Malaquais, suggest that losing the continental delineation altogether would make the discourse more useful:

It is not worth defining the African city. I am not convinced it is possible to speak of African cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as if they constituted a separate category. It seems to me that it would be better to think about the city in general, taking African cities as a starting point, prototypes of a possibly global urban form. I believe that the type of urban center that tends to be considered the standard – the Euro-American city of the first world – are nothing like it. The standard is rather found in cities that are not part of the industrial-

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Town.

Edgar Pieterse is the Director of the African Centre for Cities (ACC) based in Cape



ized North, if only because they are much more numerous. In any event, they offer, in my opinion, significantly more useful reference points. (Malaquais, 2006, p. 18)

Chenal defines this as the *altermodern* African city:

As we see it today, this African city is in transition, constantly changing, diverging from the European model (in terms of architecture and planning), and, like every other city in the world, heading in unknown directions. This city has (temporarily?) taken the form of a hybrid ensemble that we could call *altermodern* that is, a modernity different from that of industrialized, progressive, Western Countries; *altermodernity* is no longer the product of a blend of a white colonial model and black indigenous practices, but one that results from another trajectory and vernacular, one that is establishing its own rules and resolutely affirming this 'other modernity.' (Jérôme Chenal, Pedrazzini, & Kaufmann, 2009)

According to him, «a city is defined by its lifestyles, forms, and economic and symbolic positioning on the international scene, not by consumer practices, financial flows and the movements of the hyper-mobile elite. The city is defined – among other things – by its inhabitants, their aspirations and desires, and how they see their city.» (Jerome Chenal, 2014, p. IX). A similar approach is taken by AbdouMaliq Simone, which refutes the simplistic assumption that «African cities don't work» or are just «works in progress» and decided to work instead on looking at how African cities become «a locus for the elaboration of translocal economies unfolding and deployed within logics and practices that stand aside the usual notions of growth and development.» (Simone, 2004, p. 2).

African cities can be seen as a frontier for a wide range of diffuse experimentation with the reconfiguration of bodies, territories, and social arrangements necessary to recalibrate technologies of control. For example, there is a burgeoning interest within several European Union ministries as to what the apparent ungovernability, yet ongoing survival, of cities like Lagos and Kinshasa may have to say about the future of urban governance in general. (Simone, 2004, p. 2)

African cities are often associated with the idea of sudden growth. In *Planet of slums*, Mike Davis describes how African cities' annual urbanization rate, being greater than the average of most European cities during

#### Right and next spread

Exhibitions about Africa between 2015 and 2016:

Vitra Design Museum Gallery's "Architecture of Independence – African Modernism" and "Making Africa – A Continent of Contemporary Design" exhibitions (<http://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailseiten/african-modernism.html>);

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art's "Africa. Architecture, Culture and Identity" (<https://en.louisiana.dk/exhibition/africa>);

Philadelphia Museum of Art's "Creative Africa" which comprised five different exhibitions about contemporary Africa (<http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/838.html>).



peak growth years, contrasts with the current «dark age of stagnant urban employment and stall agricultural productivity» (Davis, 2007, pp. 14–18). According to Davis, «*Overurbanization*, in other words, is driven by the reproduction of poverty, not by the supply of jobs» and, as a consequence, Africa's slums are «growing at twice the speed of the continent's exploding cities.» (ibid.). The figures upon which Davis built his discourse belonged to international institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations. Now, despite the undeniable rise of informal settlements across the continent, the debate is quite open about the reliability of figures regarding urbanization rates in African cities, and the narratives that derived from them.

It is widely believed that urbanisation is occurring faster in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world, as migrants move from rural to urban settlements. This is a fallacy. While the populations of numerous urban areas are growing rapidly, the urbanisation levels of many countries are increasing slowly - if at all. Natural increase, rather than net in-migration, is the predominant growth factor in most urban populations. African governments, policymakers and international donors need to acknowledge fundamental changes in urbanisation trends, and respond to the irrefutable messages these impart about urban employment, incomes and economic development. (Potts, 2012, p. 3)

The analysis done by UN-Habitat in 2014 paid attention on the ongoing urban transitions and its sustainability. It claimed that 'each region, nation, city and locality is different and sustainability innovations must be tailored to specificities that vary between localities and over time. Urbanization, industrialization, sustained economic growth and broad-based human development feed on each other and, under correct guidance, can become mutually reinforcing' (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008, 2010). Unfortunately, the unavailability of data and information is not a prerogative of demographics. As a study by the Convoco! Foundation illustrates:

The United States and the United Kingdom publish more indexed journals than the rest of the world combined. Western Europe, in particular Germany and the Netherlands, also scores relatively well. Most of the rest of the world then scarcely shows up in these rankings. One of the stark-

est contrasts is that Switzerland is represented at more than three times the size of the entire continent of Africa. (Graham, Hale, & Stephens, 2011)

As Edgar Pieterse, director of the African Centre for Cities<sup>26</sup>, points out:

The power relations that these findings reflect are, of course, outrageous, but in truth it is not really much of a surprise for anyone involved in academia or broader knowledge production or media systems. It does however raise questions about some of the backroom institutional work that is required if we are to take up Ananya Roy's injunction for a 'recalibration of the geographies of authoritative knowledge'. It is clearly not enough to simply produce new knowledge from the global South. We also need to think about the vehicles for knowledge production and dissemination. (Tavengwa and Pieterse in Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 455)

From the variety of approaches that were illustrated, it is clear that the debate about the definition of the concept of African cities is far from over. Nonetheless, some trends are evident: cities in the African continent are relevant at a global level in one way or another, and their role has increased in importance over the past few decades; it is also clear that they have grown, even though probably less than expected. In their variety, they definitely represent an array of alternative urban models that are far from fully explored in their uniqueness. It is to be hoped that this knowledge will come increasingly from within. Ultimately, African cities are certainly classifiable as a paradox because they have apparently originated from true premises, but ultimately this process has led to a self-contradictory or a logically unacceptable conclusion. Paradoxes are known to be invalid arguments in themselves, but are still valuable in promoting critical thinking, and we found this to be particularly true when talking of *African cities*.

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26 Today the ACC is the most important research centre in Africa. It joins many important scholars and its focus is mainly on understanding and comparing the transformations happening in the African continent. [africancentreforcities.net](http://africancentreforcities.net)



## 2.2 GLOBAL CITIES

Since the late 19th century, the expansion and consolidation of free trade, global monetary systems, and the mass movement of goods, services and people, has gone hand in glove with the need to connect the world through networks. (Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2000)gas, electricity, information etc.

Globalization is primarily defined as an economic manifestation driven by technological advances, international cooperation, and a structural adjustment to global economic and political order dominated by multinational corporations and large international institutions (O’Riordan, 2010). Critics of globalization theory question whether the current process of globalization is truly unprecedented (Hirst, Thompson, & Bromley, 2015). Their perspective is that the world already saw a burst of international finance, trade, and production, before the First World War. That era was characterized by British political hegemony, with expanding colonies for France and Germany, and settler expansion in the US, Canada, Russia, Australia, and South America. By 1913, international trade had grown to 33% of world product. Nonetheless, as Jay Wickersham highlights, “this trade was mostly conducted between material producers and industrial states; only 11% was between two industrial states” (Wickersham, 2007, p. 3). Then came the Great Depression, which, following World War II, sparked the creation of a new political and economic order, aimed at improving international cooperation and lowering trade barriers<sup>27</sup> (ibid.). In the 1970’s, globalization processes accelerated to unprecedented levels. First, thanks to technological improvements in the field of communications, both physical and electronic. Nearly simultaneous global communications had been available since the setup of telegraph cables in the 19th century, and the speed of global travel has not seen any particular increase since the introduction of commercial jets in the 1950’s. What changed is not the speed of movement

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27 The institutions that carried out these goals included the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).



and communication, but the volume of information that can be carried (ibid.). Second, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 opened up large parts of the global population to free-market capitalism.

The fall of the Iron Curtain introduced an era in which a single political power, the United States, established a measure of hegemony over global politics and economics, just as Great Britain did in the late 19th century. Within that post-Cold War world spread a dominant political and economic ideology that emphasized a decreasing role for government ownership of businesses and redistribution of incomes through progressive taxation, in favor of deregulation and reliance on free-market solutions. The Thatcher and Reagan administrations, in Britain and the United States, played a key role in this global shift in ideologies. The 1994 World Trade Organization (WTO) Treaty, which responded to frustration over the shortcomings of GATT, gave strong legal impetus to free-trading principles around the world. (ibid.)

Lionel Barber (2016), editor of the *Financial Times*, recently defined this shift as from Globalization 1.0 to 2.0: For 500 years the west was on the rise, culminating between the late 1970's and 2007<sup>28</sup>, in Globalization 1.0 – an age of continuing ‘mini-revolutions’ brought about by rapid economic, political and especially technological change. These changes – the open system of trade, information flows and the spread of technology – occurred on the terms, and in the image of, the western-driven liberal market-based democratic values that have propelled global growth since the mid-20th century. As the ‘winner’ of the cold war, many states followed the advice of the ‘western’ model prescribed by the US-influenced global institutions: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and WTO-led trade liberalization — the so-called Washington consensus.

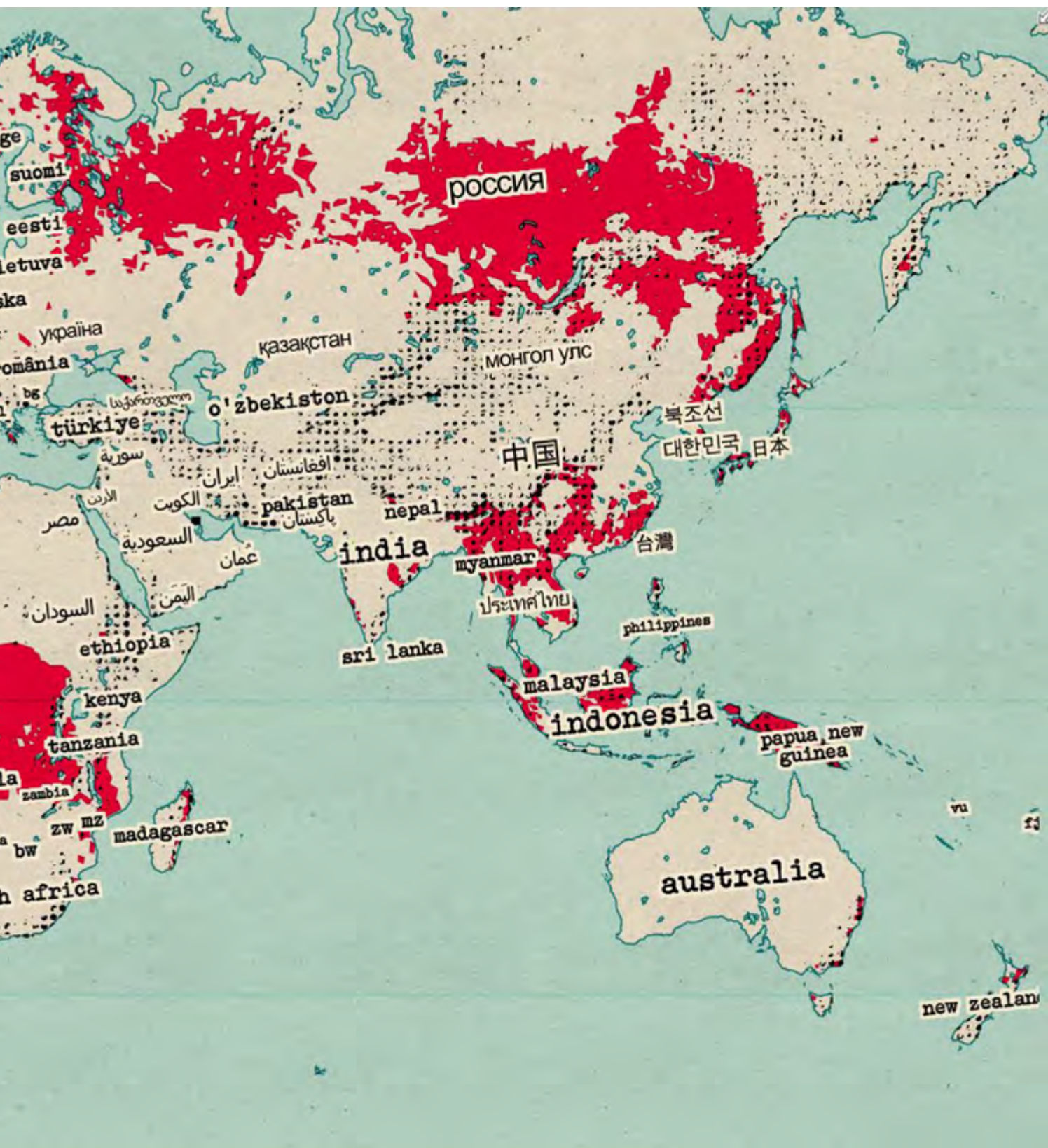
In the second half of the second decade of the 21st century a new age came: ‘Globalization 2.0.’ The old western-dominated and mono-cultural Globalization 1.0 had passed. Globalization 2.0 instead is founded upon the interdependence of several identities and cultures, characterized by new forms of non-western modernity. According to Barber, the

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28 According to Barber's perspective, the progressive abandonment of controls on capital, goods, services and labour epitomized in this period by the creation of Europe's single market and the birth of the euro reached its apogee in the summer of 2007. At that point, world financial flows had reached 14.7 per cent of global GDP (Barber, 2016).









benefits of the western-dominated 'Globalization 1.0' system over the past 30 years led to the rise of the emerging economies, with the wider G20 grouping reflecting this increase in their weight. Now these one-time market favorites face a period of prolonged and painful adjustment, especially those overly dependent on commodity cycles.

In addition to its economic representation, globalization is also linked to social change, hence the argument that a global society is emerging complementary to a world economy (Hunter, 2009, p. 2). Seeking to account for the economic, political, social, cultural and geographical characterizations within the modern world, globalization renders itself a densely conflictive theory and meta-narrative (Clark, 2003). Anthony Giddens connected this social nature of globalization with the localization of the practices, when he famously defined globalization as 'the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1991, p. 64). This relates closely with Manuel Castells' metaphor of a 'space of flows', in which material and immaterial components of global information networks through which much of the economy is coordinated, in real time across distances.

The space of flows is the infrastructure of high-speed, high-volume, high-precision communication and transportation, spanning the globe but clustered in specific places based on their ability to provide the resources relevant to advancing the networks' particular programs. Through this infrastructure, elites produce and process vast amounts of information based on which decisions are made. The logic of these decisions cannot be understood by reference to the geographic location of the decision makers, or of those affected by the decisions. Rather, the relevant frame of reference is their position within the overall global networks organized in the pursuit of wealth and power. This placeless logic separates the space of flows, its physical nodes and the

people operating them, from their geographic environment, the neighboring local population and their local cultures. (Stalder, 2006, p. 150)

However, globalization can also be defined from the perspective of a cultural argument. Kay Milton views culture as ‘consisting of everything we know, think, and feel about the world,’ thus citing globalization as the way the world is imagined or perceived versus the events that actually happen throughout the world (Milton, 1993, p. 215).

If we wish to understand the local character of our lives, the changing nature of the places in which we live, we have to grasp both the wider global context of which we are a part and what it is that makes us distinctly local [...] We are part of more than one world. We live local versions of the world and in so doing we have to locate ourselves within a wider global context. (Allen & Massey, 1996, p. 1)

Some, like David Harvey, argue that in many cases the influence and intensity of a wider global context is increasing and therefore eroding, at different speeds, the very nature of local (Harvey, 1991). In this perspective, the global is seen as an actively disrupting force, “whose processes of accumulation thrive on constantly disrupting the spatial and temporal arrangements upon which stable forms of local social organization might be constructed” (M. P. Smith, 2000, pp. 103–4). And this is when space comes into play, as Henri Lefebvre contends, as the root of the totality of political, economic, and cultural conditions of society, it thus becomes a central concept in the urgency for infusion of spatial thinking within planning discourse and practice (Lefebvre, 1992). It is Edgar Pieterse that notes, how “while Castells industrial location meta-narrative example is finite and possibly speculative, it represents the transformative power of influence in globalization to induce particular spatial dynamics in the evolution and management of urban territories and systems” (Pieterse, 2008, p. 17).

Globalization materializes itself in space by becoming place. This place is primarily the city. The following chapter will analyze the conceptualization of the city as ‘global’ and its implications. It centers on the analysis of practices and places, to investigate the relationship between globalization, architecture and urban development. First, it provides an overview of the concept of globalization, global cities and the fundamental turn to the localization of its practices and places. Second,

it illustrates the evolution of the theoretical struggle between global and regional theories and the key role in the analysis of practices and places in the attempt to find some middle ground between the two.

### 2.2.1. Research Globalization

Large cities around the world are the terrain where multiplicities of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms. These localized forms are, in good part, what globalization is about. (Sassen, 2000, p. 92)

The term 'World city' was coined as early as 1915 by Patrick Geddes and later reintroduced by Peter Hall (Hall, 1966), Friedmann (Friedmann & Goetz, 1982) and Stren (Stren, 1996). Others used different terms to express similar concepts, like 'supervilles' (Braudel, 1984) and 'informational city' (Castells, 1996). Nonetheless, it was Sassen that introduced the concept of Global Cities in what is now its most commonly acknowledged definition, despite its declared – and intentional – “fuzziness” (Sassen, 2001, p. 348). Her notion referred specifically to the contemporary world, contrasting with previous conceptualization, like 'world city,' which instead pointed at the permanent state of particular city models (Sassen, 1984). Sassen defined the global city as “a function of a cross border network of strategic sites” (Sassen, 2001, p. 348). Earlier uses of the notion spanned over a variety of definitions, and did not incorporate the transnational nature of globalization that ultimately characterized Sassen's approach. Sassen famously defined the global city according to seven hypotheses. The global city has been object of a number of critiques since its first publication. In later editions of *The Global City*, Sassen addressed some of them. Global cities have been accused of homogenization and an overly Western-centric hierarchization in their theoretical conceptualization of the world urban landscape. Concerning the issue of homogenization, Sassen clearly explains how 'there is no such thing as a single global city'. There is no fixed number of global cities because it depends on countries de-regulating their economies, privatizing public sectors and the extent to which national and foreign firms and markets make a particular city a basing point for their operations.

Cities are the terrain where people from many different countries are most likely to meet and a multiplicity of cultures come together. The international character of major

cities lies not only in their telecommunication infrastructure and international firms; it lies also in the many different cultural environments in which these workers exist. One can no longer think of centers for international business and finance simply in terms of the corporate towers and corporate culture at its center. (Sassen, 2000, pp. 88–89)

The global city is the operational scaffolding of that other fuzzy notion, the global economy. The development of global city functions in different cities across the world does indeed signal convergence, but this is a highly specialized, institutionally differentiated process. “A very different process from the kind of homogenization/convergence that we see in consumer markets and the global entertainment industry” (Sassen, 2001, p. 348).

The first hint to a hierarchical subdivision of world cities emerged in a paper by Friedmann: ‘The World City Hypothesis’ (Friedmann, 1986) who, together with Goetz in a later work also introduced the concept of a ‘global network of cities’ which would assume the role of ‘command centers’ to control the new international division of labour, as it formed thanks to new technologies in the field of communications and the advent of multinational corporations (Friedmann & Goetz, 1982). The result of this division was the appearance of service-oriented cities in the developed world; a number of manufacturing cities in the developing middle-income world; and Third World cities, inextricably tied to their informal-economy, and disconnected from the global networks. This conceptual framework constituted the backbone of the world cities theory until Beaverstock and Taylor followed upon Castell’s concept of ‘space of flows’ (Castells, 1996) and shifted the focus of their research from the nodes to the relationships and the connections between the cities that constitute the global network (Beaverstock, Smith, & Taylor, 1999).

### **2.2.2 Urban Globalization**

Locations constitute both space and place. Locations are a geographical fix of economic, political and cultural processes at the local, national and global scales. These scalar processes create space and generate place. This fix is never static or completed; locations are always in the process of becoming. The processes of globalization flow into and out of this place-space nexus in a variety of ways. The popular view is

that globalization leads to space. The particularities of place are overwhelmed by globalization to create a bland space that covers most of the world. I contend that globalization is a dialectic process that creates both space and place. The connection between location and globalization is not simply the creation of space; it is the formation of new forms space-place nexus. Globalization unfolds over space; globalization takes place. Through and in globalization place is transformed into space and space is reworked into place. (Short, 2001, pp. 17–18)

The global/world cities framework asserts a hierarchy of cities but is unable to account fully for the materialization of such a hierarchy, and even less so in relation to the long histories of colonialism and imperialism (Roy, 2009). Space is a ‘container’ in these theoretical reports; its ‘production’ remains unexplained (N. Smith, 2002). How to investigate the connection between global dynamics and local realities? This research adopts the approach suggested by Saskia Sassen, which is based on the recovering of place and production in city-based analysis of the global economy. In her call for a new ‘geography of centrality’ Sassen provides the fundamental framework to draw the categories of place and process into the analysis of contemporary cities, through a focus on practices, (Sassen, 2000, pp. 79–80). Doing so allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which they are embedded, and to recover the concrete, localized processes through which globalization exists ‘and to argue that multiculturalism in large cities is as much a part of globalization as is international finance’ (ibid.) .

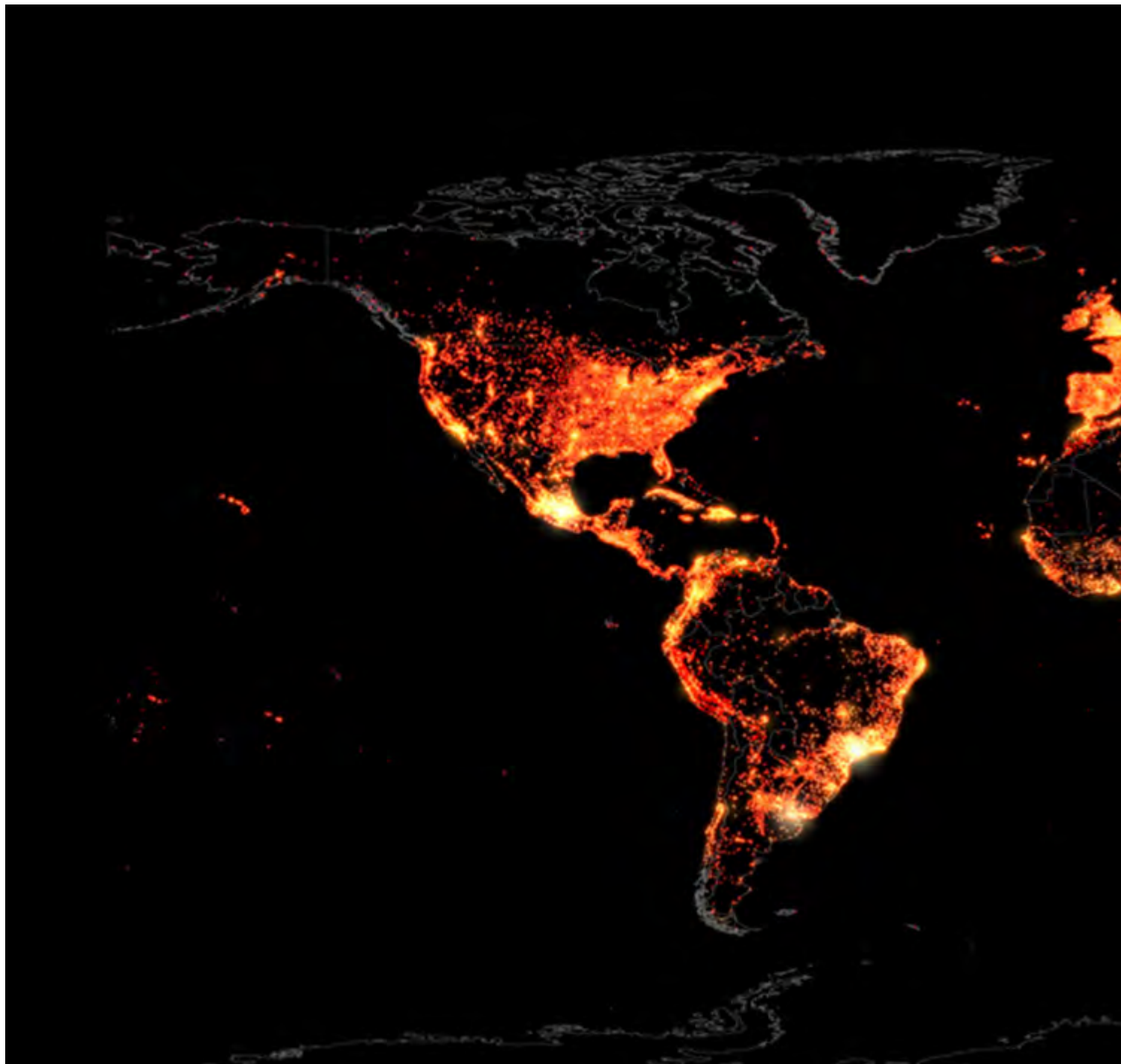
The centrality of place in a context of global processes engenders a transnational economic and political opening in the formation of new claims and hence in the constitution of entitlements, notably rights to place, and, at the limit, in the constitution of new forms of ‘citizenship’ and a diversity of citizenship practices. The global city has emerged as a site for new claims: by global capital, which uses the city as an ‘organizational commodity,’ but also by disadvantaged sectors of the urban population, frequently as internationalized a presence in large cities as capital. The de-nationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims centered in

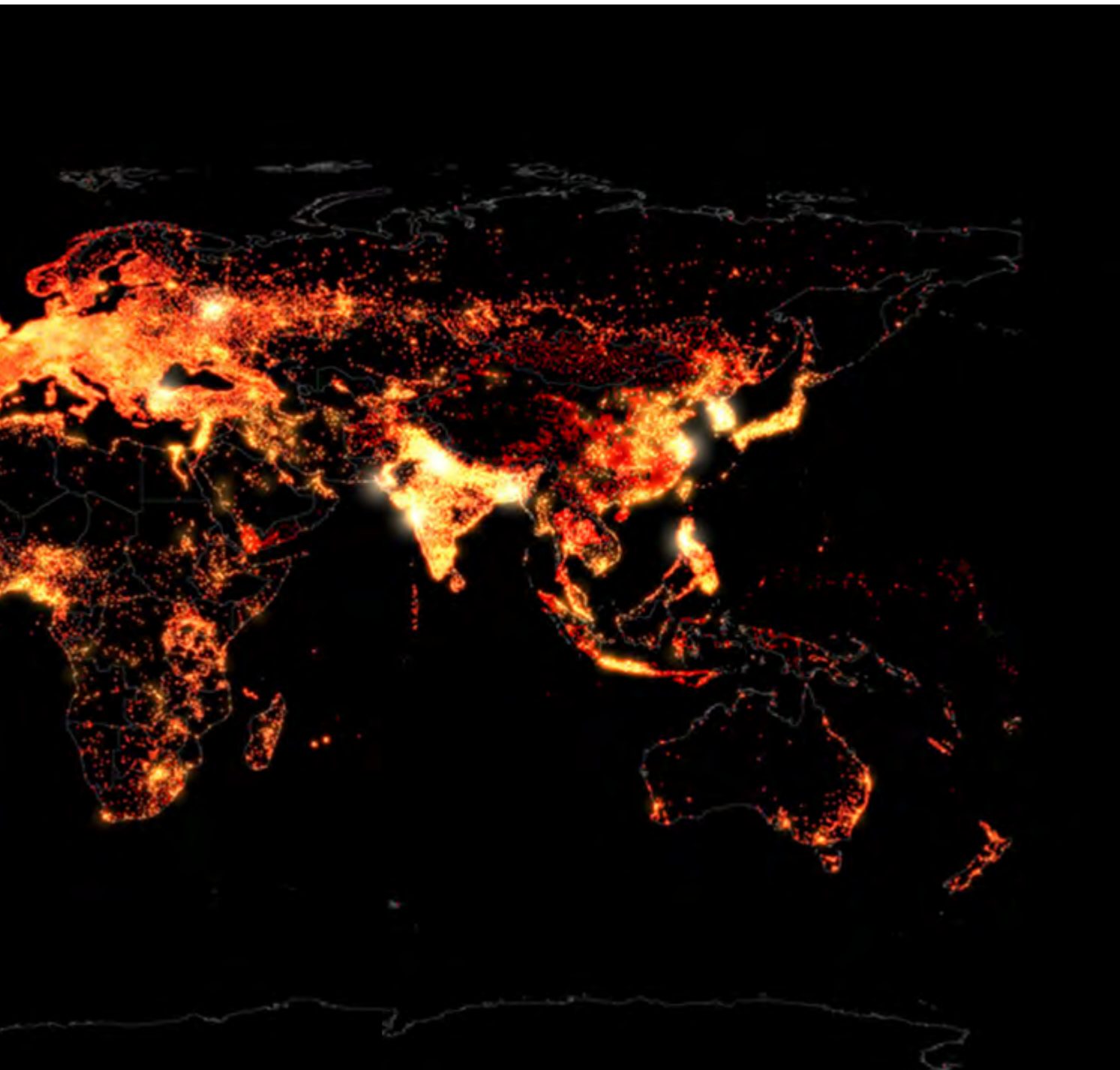
transnational actors and involving contestation constitute the global city as a frontier zone for a new type of engagement. (Sassen, 2000, p. 92)

Today, thanks to advances in electronic media and telecommunications, people live simultaneously in both bounded urban public environments as well as highly constructed personal virtual environments. Kristen Walker argues that such virtual connections permit national formations to be maintained across international boundaries, as individuals construct virtual neighborhoods that sustain a life of 'long-distance nationalism' (Walker, 2001). In the 'Architectures of Globalization' conference held in 2000 at the University of California, Berkeley, a number of contemporary theorists gathered to discuss the ways in which architecture and the built environment are shaped by, and shape, globalization. The conference shifted the traditional discourse on globalization and architecture from a focus on the architectural object, preferring instead to consider the broad social, economic and political processes that are involved in forming the built environment.

Much discussion about this subject has involved the consideration of architecture as an agent of the so-called 'McDonaldization' phenomenon, in which global flows of trade, capital and ideas are construed as a force that threatens the local. Within this context, place becomes something that is on the verge of being lost to an outside force beyond the control of the people within particular locations. (Walker, 2001, p. 70)

In this conference, theorist Michel Laguerre argued that the movement of people as 'embodied culture,' through processes such as forced economic migration and global tourism, makes the association of place with a single, unchanging culture difficult to sustain. Instead, Laguerre used the idea of 'poles' to describe the communities in which people are bound together, often within highly accelerated frames of space and time that are alien to their conventional environments. For example, migration not only extends the meaning of place outward but also disrupts our conventional assumptions about place. In this instance, an individual has the ability to transcend his 'ethnopole,' (a community that comprises people with the same ethnic background and has characteristics relating to an ethnic homeland, and to merge with another pole, such as the 'global technopole,' a community whose economy is







based on high-tech industries and involves designers, programmers and manufacturers from around the world). In recognizing the very tenuous and permeable boundaries of these diasporic poles, Laguerre introduced the notion of 'spatial scales' to describe how migration between these poles is more than just a system of political and economic flows or an interface between the local and the global: poles are places of continuous change, where social struggle and negotiation take place (Crysler, 2000). This reconnects to Greig Crysler's idea to move the discussion beyond the simple binaries that oppose the local to the global, and the fixed to the fluid, in which the concept of place becomes not so much a static repository of authentic and rooted culture as a site of contest and contradiction (Crysler, 2000). One of the dilemmas architects face today is how, in the context of communities that are increasingly characterized by a mix of races, genders and cultures, architecture can represent the cultural values of a multinational community within a global city. Jim Collins suggests that this problem should firstly be addressed by examining how the media, the Internet and consumer catalogues help construct and disseminate images with global currency (Collins, 2000).

What emerges from these questions is that physical, urban, 'places' represent important intersections between global culture and its local expression. The urban forms that are realized are the ultimate embodiment of this tension. They represent the response to local demands for both global and local needs and are produced – both by and for – the practices of equally globalized citizens. Matthew Barac (2013) makes a point about the relevance of a philosophical interpretation of urban order as it analyzes the theoretical framework of contemporary urban studies on the 'global South' in their stride towards the 'world city' model. Barac argues against the trend of dematerialization of the urban milieu that is taking place in the discussion between society and space, which leads him to formulate the question of what makes the African city 'whole.' There is a need for the reappraisal of the topic of urban order and "the re-establishment of useful links between how African cities are seen and how they are made" (Barac, 2013, p. 38).

Most scholars agree upon the fact that African cities have grown to become increasingly global, because of the intensity of their interaction as hubs of international finance and business, corporate and communication services, as well as carriers of mass information and culture. Some even went as far as compiling lists based on a number of indica-

#### Previous spread

An urban agglomeration is a continuous urban spread constituting a city or town area comprising the built-up area of a central place (usually a municipality) and its adjoining outgrowth or suburb.

The map shows the major cities and urban agglomerations of the world. The brighter colour indicates the higher population concentration whereas the dull colour indicates less population. Major agglomerations of the world are highlighted, eg. in Japan, China and South-east Asia, Indian Subcontinent. This map also depicts the world urban population distribution, eg. the coastal regions of Atlantic have higher concentration of urban population, especially in Americas and Europe.

<http://www.cartoskill.com/Static/WorldUrbanAgglomeration.html>

Data Source: GeoNames.org

tors to identify which countries in Sub Saharan Africa can be defined as 'global cities' (van der Merwe, 2004). In his paper *Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality* (2002), Eric Sheppard notes how "space has become less important as a result of globalization" (ibid. p. 309). Sheppard denounces how "some mainstream economists have recently highlighted an important role for geography as a constraint to realizing full globalization (i.e., ubiquitous development) because of the constraints imposed by tropical climes and distance from the sea" (ibid.). Yet, these analyses share what Doreen Massey (Massey, 1999) identified as an impoverished space/time imaginary – one that eliminates spatial difference in favor of a universal narrative of change. The 'shrinking world' metaphor, in which space is progressively dominated by time, has been widely utilized to describe this trend. Ever since the 'time-space convergence' (Janelle, 1969), 'collapsing space and time' (Brunn & Leinbach, 1991), and 'time-space compression' – coined by David Harvey (Harvey, 1992) as a warning, characterizing the globalizing world as "a speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us" (ibid. p. 242). Speed has become a central metaphor for what is distinctive about contemporary globalization. While space is collapsing and time is speeding up in absolute terms, with globalization, time is becoming relatively more critical than space (Jessop, 2008). The point is, as Sheppard notes that while "some geographers insist that spatiality still matters, such analyses are posed at a high level of abstraction. There are, in fact, contrasting views on what aspects of spatiality matter most" (Sheppard, 2002, p. 310). "Globalisation may well have eliminated space [...] but it has by no means undermined the significance of location, of place" (Martin, 1999, pp. 15–16). As Sheppard continues, places are represented as territorial spaces, and the debate about place and globalization has focused on how territories still matter in a space of flows. Similarly, Lefebvre contended that since space is at the root of the totality of political, economic, and cultural conditions of society, it becomes a central concept in the urgency for infusion of spatial thinking within planning discourse and practice (Lefebvre, 1992). Locations are a blended conundrum of different ever-evolving processes at different scales. There are two main views on the issue: On one hand, some have sought to understand how globalization has been accompanied by the growing influence of certain localities, such as new industrial spaces or

financial centers. Others have looked at how globalization is associated with the construction of scale. In this view, local trajectories depend on how places are embedded in a range of territorial scales, from the local to the global. In both cases, the conceptualization of space/time can be characterized as territorial. "The prospects of localities depend on place-based processes and both shape and are shaped by the regional, national, and global territories in which they are embedded" (Sheppard, 2002, p. 310).

A major intervention by geographers into debates on globalization has been to demonstrate the importance of territorial economies and governance structures. Geographers have been critical of prioritizing the nation-state scale in such analyses, highlighting smaller-scale territories or places: industrial districts and city-regions, located within but occasionally seen as crossing, national boundaries. There is widespread agreement that globalization has increased the importance and influence of such subnational territorial economies and politics. Marxist geographers have long argued that capitalism successively creates agglomerations of economic activity as spatial fixes to facilitate accumulation, only for these spatial fixes later to become barriers to further accumulation. Spatial fixes require investments by both firms and the state in the built environment and social infrastructure in places that become problematic as growth sectors, production technologies, and locational preferences shift. Thus, space adds an important extra complication to the instabilities of capitalism. (Sheppard, 2002, p. 310)

Sheppard and Helga Leitner further argue that under conditions of space-time compression, 'relative locational advantage is argued to have become less important, and place-based characteristics more important, in determining the relative attractiveness of places for capital' (Sheppard & Leitner, 1998). Places aggressively seek to differentiate themselves in the competition for investment, and geographically mobile capital becomes both responsive to small differences between places and able to manipulate localities to create favorable conditions (Leitner, 1990). A real differentiation has thus accompanied globalization: as the global economy shrinks, differences and inequalities between places are growing. As A.J Scott argues, that this conceptualization of territorial economies has dramatic implications for the geography of globalization, since global city-regions now "constitute a mosaic that is beginning to over-

ride the core-periphery relationships that have hitherto characterized much of the macro geography of capitalist development” (Scott, 2000, p. 87). Their success being based on their possessing certain economic, political, and cultural characteristics, rather than their location in global cores or peripheries. Nonetheless, as Sheppard notes, Scott struggled to make good on this vision, when he noted that 24 of the world’s potential city-regions, all located in the global south, do not yet qualify as such.

Any discussion of place and globalization, and thus of the local-global nexus, invokes a concept of geographic scale, but scale has recently become an influential theoretical framework for thinking about the spatial dynamics of globalization. Theorists of scale build on research on place by asking how change in any one territorial unit is affected by change at other geographic scales. The existence of a vertical hierarchy of scales from the body to the globe is generally taken for granted, and certain kinds of activities are often associated with particular scales (trade with the global, trade unions with the national, and caring work with the home). Scale theorists have argued, however, that these are not necessary relations but artifacts of how scales are constituted under certain conditions. Emphasizing that all scales are socially constituted in relation to one another, scale theorists have sought to conceptualize how scales come into existence and articulate with one another and how events at a particular scale are shaped by their relationships with different scales. (Sheppard, 2002, p. 313)

Most importantly, observers of transnational corporations, typically seen as the icons of globalization, have concluded that their global reach has not resulted in a loss of either national identity or attachment to localities (cf. Ruigrok & Tulder, 1996). Instead, they seem to have engaged in a strategy of global localization, in which global competitiveness is rooted in close relationships with particular localities, such as headquarter locations, low-cost production sites, industrial districts, and demand nodes (Mair, 1997). As Sheppard (2002) summarizes, contemporary scale theorists share a common emphasis on the territorial nature of societal organization and its implications for globalization with those who focus on place. Their important addition being the need to consider how the fortunes of territories of a particular scale are shaped by the social construction of scale in coevolution with globalization. Changes in places of a particular scale thus depend on how they articulate with

changes at other scales, implying that globalization and localization are not independent processes but need to be considered in relation to one another (Brenner, 2001).

The use of the term 'Positionality' is used to describe how different entities are positioned with respect to one another in space/time. Positionality has three main characteristics: First, it is a relational construct whose conditions of possibility for an agent depend on her or his position with respect to others – as in network theory. Second, positionality involves power relations, both in the sense that some positions tend to be more influential than others and in the sense that emphasizing the situated nature of all knowledge challenges the power of those who claim objectivity. Third, positionality is continually enacted in ways that both reproduce and challenge its preexisting configurations.

The reasons because Positionality is relevant in the establishment of the theoretical framework of this thesis are that first attention to positionality calls attention to how connections between places play a role in the emergence of geographic inequalities within the global economy; second, attention to positionality has profound theoretical consequences for understanding globalization; Third, positionality stresses that the conditions of possibility in a place do not depend primarily on local initiative or on embedded relationships splayed across scales, but just as much on direct interactions with distant places. Fourth, it highlights the unequal power relations that stem from such asymmetries. Fifth, positionality demands attention to questions of scale<sup>29</sup>.

Capitalist globalization has increased the possibilities, but also has durabilities that shape which possibilities are likely to be taken up. A central challenge in grasping the spatial dynamics of globalization is understanding how these forces work, the kinds of wormholes or refoldings that are likely to come into existence, and the places and spaces that are cre-

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29 In principle, positionality can be mapped by depicting the relationships between different agents, in different places, and at different scales. Mapping it onto the Earth's surface is far more complex, however, because there may be little relationship between proximity in Euclidean geographic space and positionality. When residents of the same territory share a similar positionality, positionality can be a shared feature of the place where they reside. Yet, as Massey (1994) insisted, living in the same place does not imply a similar positionality. In addition, whereas proximity in geographic space is generally thought to be symmetric, positionality is often an asymmetric relationship: core agents exert more influence over peripherally positioned agents' locations than vice versa (Sheppard, 2002, p. 323).

ated by and shape further change. This is the case both for those who seek to analyze globalization and those who seek to change it. (Sheppard, 2002, p. 325)

Attention to positionality suggests that space is not diminishing in importance because of globalization, nor is it becoming less important than time. Indeed, it adds an important layer to the discussion: that of the relativity of the value and role of each actor and place, in relationship to his position in space and time.

### **2.2.3. Architecture Globalization**

It may be accurate to talk about architects being involved in a process of globalization, but it is also true that the entire profession is being subjected to movements going in absolutely opposite directions: one direction is globalization, and the other is its absolute opposite-namely, a kind of regionalization. I think it is a wrenching movement, a tension and torsion between an expansion of perspective, on the one hand, and an implosion of perspective, on the other hand. (Koolhaas, 1996, p. 232)

Ever since ancient Greece, in architecture the struggle between the global and the local has assumed many faces over the course of time (Hunter, 2009). If we accept David Clark's interpretation of globalization as being essentially a 'meta-narrative', it appears natural that some 'counter-narratives' must be established in order to rebalance the forces at play (Clark, 2003).

These two poles of modern architecture – supermodernism and the particularity of place – are clear reflections of the two poles of globalisation – homogenisation and localisation. As joint products of globalisation they must not be seen as totally distinct. The city of Bilbao did not just erect Frank Gehry's Guggenheim, the definitive iconic building, it restored the fabric of its historic centre. The future of both architectural persuasions will be tested in the latest and most urgent global crisis – the survival of the ecology of the planet such that it will continue to support our global civilisation. This is the supreme challenge for globalisation: the cause, the effect and the resolution are and will be global

and local. It will affect all aspects of social, political and economic life and it will, as day follows night, have a profound impact on architecture. (Adam, 2008, p. 1)

One force seeks to safeguard and promulgate established indigenous architectural traditions, forms, decorative motifs, and technologies, advocating historical continuity, cultural diversity, and preservation of identity, all symbolized by a particular architectural vocabulary, just as spoken languages and local dialects impart identity. The other force promotes invention and dissemination of new forms using new technologies and materials in response to changing functional needs and sensibilities. It places a premium on systemization, flexibility, and interchangeability (Lewis, 2002). As Eldemery notes, “for some, globalization entails the Westernization of the world. Some see globalization as generating increasing homogeneity, while others see it producing diversity and heterogeneity through increased hybridization” (Eldemery, 2009, p. 344). Globalization dynamics have always had an impact on architecture and urban development.

Society can be made a mirror to architecture. We can understand architecture as a natural reflection of what is currently socially, politically and economically. (Adam, 2008, p. 1).

The global paradigm of the contemporary world introduces a new class of problems in terms of urban development. Being active in the urban realm in the present age involves understanding the matrix of global and local forces, of domination and resistance, and of a condition of rapid change and great transformation brought about by the “global restructuring of capital and multidimensional effects of trends and new technologies” (Eldemery, 2009, p. 345).

We can then think of cities also as one of the sites for the contradictions of the globalization of capital. On the one hand, they concentrate a disproportionate share of corporate power and are one of the key sites for the overvalorization of the corporate economy; on the other, they concentrate a disproportionate share of the disadvantaged and are one of the key sites for their de valorization. This joint presence happens in a context where (1) the transnationalization of economies has grown sharply and cities have become increasingly strategic for global capital; and (2) marginalized people have increasingly found their voice and are

making claims on the city as well. This joint presence is further brought into focus by the sharpening of the distance between the two. These joint presences have made cities a contested terrain.

The global city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities, notably through immigration. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes non-corporate cultures and identities with 'otherness,' thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (Sassen, 2000, p. 92)

Because of the technological advances achieved during the past century, urban areas of the world have grown at an unprecedented pace. Such growth has been heavily influenced by the global dynamics of the contemporary world, in terms of function, aesthetic and technology. Modern technologies have changed the way cities grow, and their architecture. Not only thanks to new construction techniques and materials, but also in terms of the expectations of the public and its demands when it comes to urban development, and the taste of the clients, when zooming-in at the architectural scale. The profession itself has evolved. Computer-aided design has changed the way buildings are drawn and offered precedently unimaginable new ways to collaborate on the design. Contemporary international architects seldom visit building sites, as all the necessary information can be gathered and transmitted from remote. In architecture, this has led to the association of globalization with a loss of identity. In the words of Hans Ibelings:

After the explicitly defined spatiality of postmodernism and deconstructivism, it looks as if the decades-old idea of boundless and undefined space is set to become the main *Leitbild* for architects. This boundless space is no dangerous wilderness or frightening emptiness, but rather a controlled vacuum, for if there is one thing that characterizes this age it is total control. The undefined space is not an emptiness but a safe container, a flexible shell. (Ibelings, 1998, p. 62)

Marc Augé's *Non-places: introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (2009), introduced the meaninglessness of the built environment, or rather the experience of that meaninglessness as an unavoidable effect of globalization. The book revolves around the difference between



place and space, where place is defined in anthropological terms as an area that has acquired meaning because of human activities. Augé argues that a growing proportion of space lacks meaning in the classic anthropological sense because nobody feels any attachment to it. As Ibelings explains, he sees this phenomenon as “one of the three forms of abundance characterizing the *supermodem* condition: an abundance of space, an abundance of signs and an abundance of individualization” (Ibelings, 1998, p. 65). These non-places seem to turn up everywhere and everywhere to look the same. All over the world, supermarkets, shopping malls, hotels and airports share a similar, recognizable form, acquiring an element of familiarity in their tacit uniformity. This ‘expressionlessness’ has become the main characteristic of global architecture: cities have undergone comparable developments and assumed similar shapes. High-rise downtowns, low-rise suburbs, urban peripheries, motorways and business parks are now ubiquitous.

The realization that theoretically everything can stand everywhere undermines the postmodern dogma that architecture must always have a unique, authentic relationship with the context. (Ibelings, 1998, p. 69)

Some even argue that this is already leading to a loss of relevance of the traditional city centers, because of the polarizing effect that some of these placeless entities are assuming. ‘The ring roads in the periphery are surrounded by the last large open spaces in the urban agglomerations which, because of their central location between city center and suburbs, are able to guarantee the degree of public accessibility demanded by these kinds of mass functions’ (Neutelings, 1986). Spiegler adds to that, arguing that the urbanized zones alongside motorways and around airports, with their shopping malls, cultural amenities, convention centers but above all warehouses, supply depots, storage - sheds and parking lots will eventually undergo the same process as the city centers (Spiegler, 2004). Context is completely lost in the neutrality of this particular type of contemporary architecture. ‘It seems that architecture is capable of being just as footloose as all those internationally operating corporations nowadays known as ‘global players’ rather than ‘multinationals’ because they no longer have specific ties with any one nation,’ argues Ibelings (1998, p. 88).

Whereas postmodernist and deconstructivist architecture almost always contained a message, today architecture is increasingly conceived as an empty medium. Nowhere is that more evident than in the fashion for ‘inscribed’ buildings, structures whose smooth facades are covered with fixed or moving text and images. The text is an addition to an intrinsically expressionless form, just like the label on a can of soup. (Ibelings, 1998, p. 89)

The postmodernist and deconstructivist search for hidden meanings has become largely superfluous since simply, more often than not, there is no hidden meaning. Meaning now derives from how architecture looks, how it is used and, above all, how it is experienced. Ibelings argues that this has led to a new evolution in architecture, which attaches greater importance to visual, spatial and tactile sensation rather than its intellectual virtues. Certainly, the frame of reference is quickly changing, as contemporary architecture media evolves together with society and technology. Trends and aesthetic values spread across the globe, but architecture still needs to be built, and also needs to last longer than a fashion or a phone. Despite the evidence, people realize this, and this is where regionalism comes into play.

According to Alexander Tzonis, it was Vitruvius who first held that regional architecture was shaped by particular internal and external physical restrictions, and that different regional ‘nature’ was the ordaining force behind different types of structures (Tzonis in Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003, pp. 8–21). One of the first notorious clashes between global and regional architecture is the story of St. Sophia, whose first version was a timber-roof basilica modeled after old St. Peter’s in Rome and that was imported because of the predominant style of the time. After it burnt down, the Romans had learned to respect the cultural richness of the conquered region, and Emperor Justinian decided to construct the Hagia Sophia, “combining the vastness of Constantine’s Basilica in Rome, the ornamentation characteristic of Asia Minor, and oriental patterns” (Speck, 2012, pp. 71–79).

Byzantine architecture was defined by a momentous mixture of cultural influences and styles. However, regionalism has also developed thanks to less impetuous processes, as is the case of the ‘renaissance’ revival. By the end of the 15th Century, Gothicism had achieved a universal dominance, which of course was not very fitting for the Italian climate. In the Italian cities like Florence, a renewal of classic Roman tra-

dition was combined with local materials and construction techniques, to evolve in a specific regional style (Speck, 2012). In this perspective, regionalist architecture has always been the result of a stratification of styles and techniques, which led to incremental rather than disruptive innovation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nation-states were becoming increasingly predominant, and so was the influence of Regionalism. In some cases, groups whose identity had been ignored began declaring independence, while other nation-states came to romanticize their own folk traditions (Colquhoun, 2012). In the meantime, Art Nouveau ignited a resistance of classicism and at the same time the search for new forms, resisting industrialization with an emphasis on unique decorative elements. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the spread between global and regional movements grew proportionally to the speed of technological advances. Modernism was adopted by both socialist and capitalist countries to epitomize the radical break with the past that they represented. As Robert Adam points out, “in architecture, the historical development of globalization corresponded very closely to the ascendancy of modernism” (Adam, 2012, p. 2).

For countries swept up in the tide of the global economy, the association of Modernism with rationality, progress and successful and dominant north-Atlantic economies was irresistible. Furthermore, the Modernist association with the principal building types identified with key aspects of globalisation – the corporate office, the airport, the international hotel and the shopping mall – provided a clear symbolic link with the engines of global capital expansion. In a very short space of time, the homogenisation of global consumerism had its parallel in the homogenisation of city centres throughout the world [...] The glass-walled office block has become the Coca-Cola of architecture. (Ibid.)

The best architects of the time were actively involved in the debate. Le Corbusier’s role for example has been somehow controversial as far as the global-regional debate is concerned. In fact, despite his adoption of modern technologies and formal praise of an ‘industrialization’ of architectural elements, his sensibility has always steered towards a sensibility for the local identity of the context (Hunter, 2009).

L’Architecture est le résultat de l’état d’esprit d’une époque. Nous sommes en face d’un événement de la pensée contemporaine; événement international [...] les techniques, les

problèmes posés, comme les moyens scientifiques de réalisation, sont universels. Pourtant, les régions ne se confondront pas, car les conditions climatiques, géographiques, topographiques, les courants des races et mille choses aujourd'hui encore profondes, guideront toujours la solution vers formes conditionnées.<sup>30</sup> (Le Corbusier, cited in Colquhoun, 2012, p. 144)

In 1932, New York Museum of Modern Art's landmark exhibition, *The International Style*, by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, introduced modern architecture to the world. Nonetheless, it was World War II that marked a significant spark in the debate, first with Elizabeth Mock, the young curator of the *Built in the USA 1932-44* exhibition at MOMA in 1947 in which she disputed the International Style as 'badly assimilated European modernism' (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003, p. 24). In the same period, Lewis Mumford published an article in the *New Yorker*, in which he claimed the superiority of 'bottom-up' design to the 'top-down' elitism propagated by MOMA, sparking a heated roundtable session from Johnson, Hitchcock and Alfred Barr. It was in that occasion that Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, defended the idea of functionalism by asserting that:

What we have looked for in architecture today is a new approach; not yet a style. A style is a successive repetition of an expression, which has become settled, as a common denominator [...] The real International Style consists of those borrowed Greek buildings, like the museums and banks and ministries throughout the world, from Leningrad to Washington, but the idea of the so-called International Style was regional in character, developing out of surrounding conditions. (Canizaro, 2012, p. 302)

Others, like Peter Blake, were less accommodating, and branded regionalism as 'trying to delay the industrial revolution in building that was finally taking place in America' (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003, p. 26). Lewis Mumford famously closed that session asking "– what is happening in modern architecture? Mumford believed that the true character of inter-

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30 Architecture is the result of the state of mind of its time. We are facing an event in contemporary thought; an international event, which we did not realize ten years ago; the techniques, the problems raised, like the scientific means to solve them, are universal. Nevertheless, there will be no confusion of regions; for climatic, geographic, topographic conditions, the currents of race and thousands of things still today unknown, will always guide solutions toward forms conditioned by them.

nationalism had gotten lost in the search for a new paradigm” (Canizaro, 2012, p. 302). Detractors of the modernist movement argued that technological progress and innovation were disrupting the architectural process, at the expenses of the local specificities of the context. By the time the United Nations building was completed in 1952, modernism had lost its bite, and regionalism had become a caricature of itself, relegated to the academia and commonly branded as kitsch or themed (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003).

These outside influences must usually be modified; they must always be assimilated. Sometimes they are too numerous, as was the case with the various cults that Imperial Rome sought to take to her bosom; sometimes they are too overwhelming, as was the case when highly organized machine industry wiped out the handicraft industries that might often have survived on a basis of local service, but could not compete with the machine in a distant market. But the drama of human development centers in part on this tension between the regional and the universal. As with a human being, every culture must both be itself and transcend itself; it must make the most of its limitations and must pass beyond them; it must be open to fresh experience and yet it must maintain its integrity. In no other art is that process more sharply focused than in architecture. (L. Mumford, 2012, p. 101)

In reaction to this cultural drift, Lewis Mumford’s critique of both modernism and regionalism gave birth to what is now defined as Critical Regionalism. As Lefaivre notes (2003) what set Mumford’s regionalism apart, was that it not only criticized an imposing power such as modernism, but more importantly it was critical of the regionalist’ century old tradition of seeing itself as anti-universal. Mumford saw regionalism as a negotiation of forces, “a process of integration rather than segregated resistance [...] Mumford was not anti-modern [...] He was at last a purveyor of a highly critical regionalism synonymous with modernism” (Hunter, 2009, p. 12).

By way of general definition, we can say that it [Critical Regionalism] upholds the individual and local architectonic features against more universal and abstract ones. In addition, however, regionalism bears the hallmark of ambiguity. On the one hand, it has been associated with movements of reform and liberation; [...] on the other, it has proved a pow-

erful tool of repression and chauvinism[...]No new architecture can emerge without a new kind of relations between designer and user, without new programs[...]Despite these limitations critical regionalism is a bridge over which any humanistic architecture of the future must pass. (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1981, p. 178)

In the 1940's Kenneth Frampton contended against Mumford, Tzonis and Lefaivre's view that the role of Critical Regionalism was to "mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place" (Frampton, 1985, p. 23). Frampton argued that a practice must remove itself both from the myth of progress brought by Enlightenment and from the urge to go back to a pre-industrial legacy. He defined this approach as 'arriere-garde' (ibid: 22). Frampton exposes, and to some extent imposes, some limits to the critical regionalist claim, somehow neglecting the fact that the ideas of region can have multiple interpretations.

A clearer understanding of context "hinders on the relation between space and place and is not entirely physical" (Hunter, 2009, p. 14). Climate defines regional architectural and urban culture, characterizing the local specificities within the global context.

Mumford has cautioned long ago against the regionalist (or critical regionalist) label as problem solver. As also Keith Eggner points out, critical regionalism may fail as "fashionable formula, as a catchword to describe a range of difficult and diverse architectures arising from markedly different circumstances" (Eggner, 2002, p. 406). Critical regionalism attempted to highlight the particular, however, as he notes, 'the generalization of the movement was so successful during certain points in history that the idea itself gained universal tendencies' (ibid.).

Critical regionalism still supports an approach that "recognizes the value of the singular, circumscribes projects within the physical, social, and constraints of the particular, aiming at sustaining diversity while benefiting from universality" (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003, p. 20).

We come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get onto the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the past? The paradox is about how to become modern and, at the same time, return to sources. "How to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization" (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 47).

In 1954, a call was made for a new approach to architecture, which attempted to combine modern architecture to the specificities of exotic climates.

A new paradigm in architecture and planning focused on energy and resource conservation [...] by consuming less and on the use of appropriate technologies in service of a utopian intention to raise the overall standard of living for the poor at a global scale. (Baweja, 2008, p. 135)

That year, Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew and Otto Königsberger<sup>31</sup> founded a new degree program at the Architecture Association (AA) School in London under the name 'Tropical Architecture.' The goals of the program reflected these new demands: the development of energy and resource-efficient architecture, as well as environmentally friendly technologies, the scientific investigation of traditional knowledge on bioclimatic building and the goal to provide adequate shelter for all. It was the forefather of what is now referred as sustainable architecture (Chang & King, 2011) and was born out of a confrontation between the paradigms of European modern architecture and the realities outside of Europe and America that had originated when, at the time of the advent of Nazism in Germany and the II World War, many modernist architects found exile outside of Europe. Ernst May in Uganda and Kenya, Bruno Taut in Japan and Otto Königsberger in India. In the 1950's they returned to Europe. At that time, modernist architects such as Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and Michel Ecochard in Morocco or Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry in Nigeria were dealing with urban planning, architecture and ethnological studies (Liscombe, 2006). Others worked for former colonies, like African, Asian and Latin American countries that had since become independent. They included Le Corbusier, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew in India, Josep Lluís Sert in Peru and Konstantinos Doxiadis in Iran and Pakistan.

In the 1950's, coinciding with decolonization, European and American architects' associations were becoming more international, counting members from many different continents. New questions were being raised, as a 1947 letter from Sert to Sigfried Giedion clearly shows: 'I think, we cannot continue to consider Central Europe as the main field

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<sup>31</sup> Maxwell Fry was a co-founder of the British MARS Group and member of CIAM. Jane Drew was also a member of MARS and CIAM. Otto Königsberger had studied under Hans Poelzig and Bruno Taut and worked in the office of Ernst May.

of interest for CIAM' (Kohte, 2009). In fact, it was at the CIAM IX congress in 1953 in Aix-en-Provence, that they identified these serious problems, as controversial although urgent tasks for modern architecture (E. P. Mumford, 2000).

At roughly the same time, in 1953 the International Conference on Tropical Architecture was held in London. Participants included Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew, Ove Arup and Otto Königsberger (Foyle, 1954). 'Tropical Architecture' has its origins in the British colonial empire. Initially dominated by the discipline of hygiene and sanitation engineers, it became a domain of colonial architecture beginning in the 1930's (Kohte, 2009). Using the knowledge that had been gathered through research on climate and hygiene, these architects sought to develop buildings suitable for the climatic conditions of the region. Around that time, the British colonial empire was coming to an end, and many of the architects who had been working in the colonies – including modernist architects – returned to England, bringing back these new experiences, which were undeniably still rooted in the colonial tradition of thought (Immerwahr, 2007)

Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, had been working as architects in Nigeria (1949-1960 University of Ibadan) and Ghana (1950 St. Francis College, Hohoe, and 1951 Adisadel College). In the African colonies, they reconceptualized their architecture, then moved to India, where they were involved in the construction of Chandigarh, with Le Corbusier. Also in India was Otto Königsberger. At the time, India was a country with more than ten million refugees, where permanent cities had to be developed very quickly with extremely limited resources, a challenge that could not be met using the traditional tools of modern urban planning and architecture (Koenigsberger, 1952). As Fello Atkinson stresses, something that is often misunderstood about Tropical Architecture is that the development of character or style in tropical architecture "did not arise so much from climate as from the availability (or more often the lack of-) materials and craftsmanship" (Atkinson, 1969, p. 547). Therefore, Königsberger sought new approaches. For him the Indian experience, as well as 'Tropical Architecture', was geared towards the search for a new approach to architecture and urban planning for all, developed on the basis of climatic factors and most of all, the prudent use of resources (Baweja, 2008).



The degree program that the three founded in 1954 was designed to help architects acquire knowledge about climatic principles and apply this knowledge as a design instrument for new solutions and designs – in Africa, Asia, America and Europe. The books on Tropical Architecture by Fry and Drew (1956, 1964), and Otto Königsberger's Manual of Tropical Housing and Building (1974) were initially conceived as textbooks for university students but, while Fry and Drew's illustrated this architectural approach with examples from the practice, Königsberger's rather indicated fundamental parameters for planning and design since he interpreted 'Tropical Architecture' as a concept, not an architectural style. These publications contributed to further spread the concept of 'Tropical Architecture' through university teaching and publications.

While in the beginning, the degree program for Tropical Architecture attracted primarily students from the former colonies it quickly evolved in the sixties and seventies, when the emerging environmental movement in Europe and America turned sustainability into a universal issue. The under documented history of tropical architecture as it emerged in post-war Britain and its colonies is an instructive tale of the relationship between the profession and broader geographies (Le Roux, 2003). Tropical architecture emerged from linkages made possible by modern communications within the spatial systems of colonialism. In particular, the networks that linked the metropolitan center and the peripheral sites of practice are an important aspect of the movement's identity. Figures such as Fry and Drew, Cubitt and Koenigsberger creatively worked their careers and knowledge into the networks that characterized a world between colonial and modernist systems. As Hannah le Roux notes, Tropical architecture was both built on and benefited from the relationship between London and its tropical peripheries:

Architects in West Africa relied on support from Britain for technical matters and to disseminate their work. The authoritative institutions located in the metropolis served to alter the conditions of tropical architecture in multiple ways. The media made the work of architects in remote locations visible to their colleagues. Institutions lent authority to the discourse of climatic responsiveness by linking it with established scientific fields. The media and educational systems allowed architects to share knowledge and material, and trained architects from tropical countries in the techniques of climatic design. The metropolitan pro-

fession reacted to the conditions under which tropical architecture was produced, in particular the potential changes of patronage at the end of the colonial system. Through journals, conferences and educational arrangements they defined and publicised the international and modern nature of the expertise of colonial architects, and helped to attract the patronage of the post-colonial elite. At the same time, through texts and curricula, metropolitan architects attempted to define the vocabulary of the new generation of tropical architects. Through these means tropical architecture reproduced itself, and in the process, shaped the architectural language of the post-colonial world. (Le Roux, 2003, pp. 352–353)

Many studies of globalization and cities have drawn on the idea of ‘world’ cities to understand the role of cities in the wider networks and circulations associated with globalization. Some cities outside the usual purview of Western urban theory – ‘Third World Cities’ – have been incorporated into these studies in so far as they are involved in those globalizing processes considered relevant to the definition of world cities. This is definitely a positive development in terms of ambitions to post-colonialize urban studies, to overcome the entrenched divisions between studies of ‘Western’ and ‘Third World’ cities. But many around the world remain ‘off the map’ of this version of urban theory. (Robinson, 2006, p. 93)

Cities are constantly compared. The idea of the ‘Global City’ has created a system of hierarchies in constant competition. These hierarchies, policy formation and the dominant discourses in urban studies priorities Anglo-American ideas and places. Within this framework, New York, Chicago and London dominate; policy tourism is seen as a one-directional movement from west to east and achievement is relative to western standards (Brill, 2015). It is time to rethink the geographies of urban and regional theory (Roy, 2009). The 20th century closed with debate and controversy about the shift from a ‘Chicago School’ of urban sociology to the ‘Los Angeles School’ of post-modern geography, but, as Roy argues, the urban future lays elsewhere.

Nonetheless, in urban theory the cities of the global South are usually assembled under the sign of under-development: ‘that last and compulsory chapter on ‘Third World Urbanization’ in the urban studies textbook’ (Roy, 2009, p. 820). The sites at which capital accumulation and

## 2.3 ORDINARY CITIES

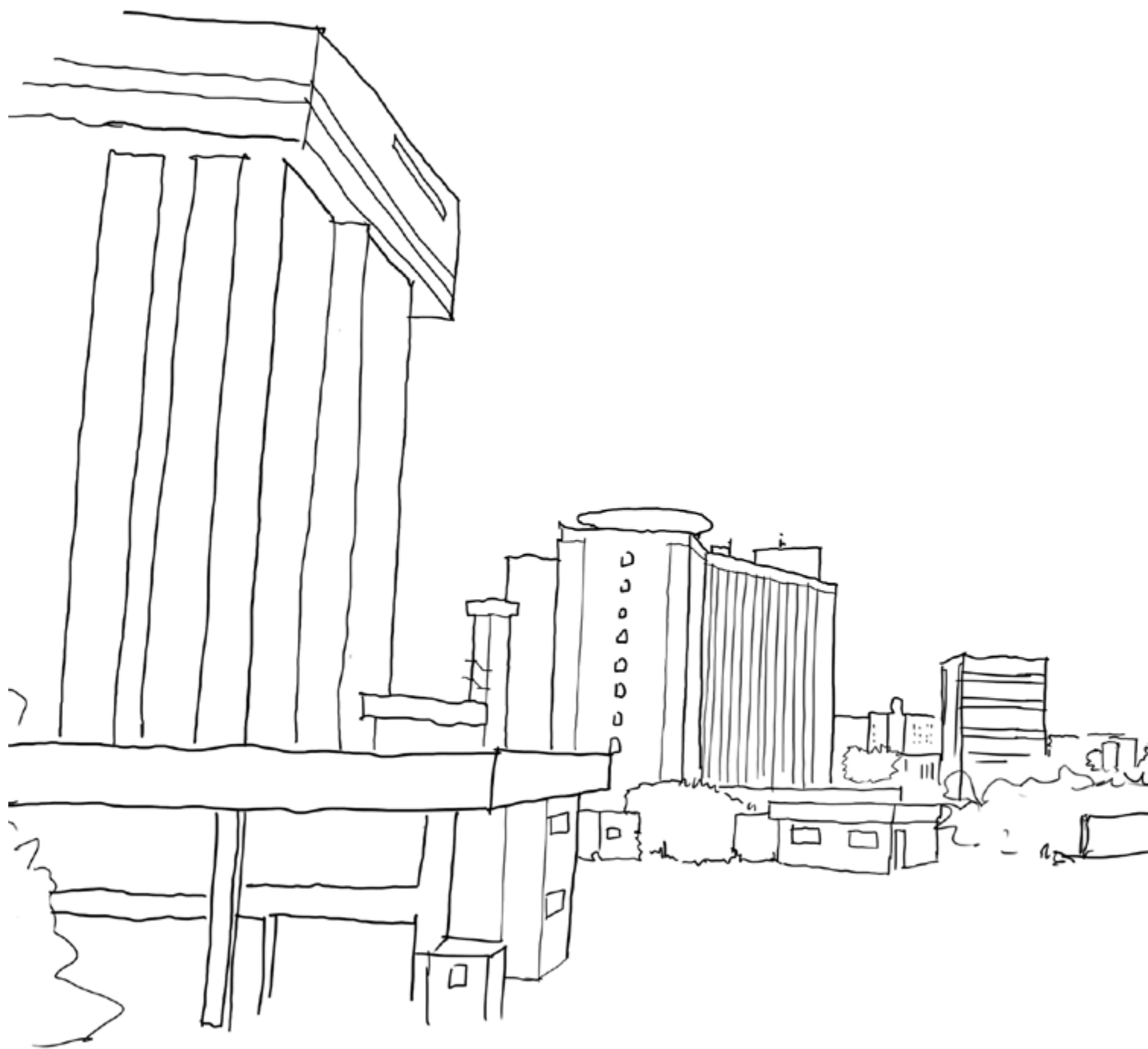
democratic governance happen under “special circumstances” (Stren, 2001, p. 205), or the mega-cities, bursting at the seams, overtaken by their own fate of poverty, disease, violence, and toxicity. “They constitute the ‘planet of slums’, with its ‘surplus humanity’ and ‘twilight struggles’” (Davis, 2007, p. 13).

Despite the relative inclusiveness of the focus on globalization processes, developmentalism continues to pervade the global – and world city – narratives, consigning poorer cities to a different theoretical world dominated by the concerns of development[...]. World cities approaches, by placing cities in hierarchical relation to one another, implicitly establish some cities as exemplars and others as imitators. In policy-related versions of these accounts cities either off the world-cities map or low down the supposed hierarchy have an implicit injunction to become more like those at the top of the hierarchy of cities [instead] [...] all cities should be viewed as ordinary, both distinctive and part of an interconnected world of cities. (Robinson, 2006, p. 94)

Some imply that a hierarchical difference between first-tier (global and usually Western) and second-tier (third-world) cities was constituent of the concept of Global city itself. It is to counter this paradigm that Jennifer Robinson frames her critique of the geography of urban theory, noting the enduring divide between ‘First World’ cities (read: global cities) that are seen as models, generating theory and policy, and ‘Third World’ cities (read: mega-cities) that are seen as problems, requiring diagnosis and reform (Roy, 2009). Robinson calls for urban theory to overcome this ‘asymmetrical ignorance’ and the ‘regulating fiction’ of the First World global city (Robinson, 2003, p. 275). Her post-colonial reading of urban studies through a deconstruction of the concept of Third-World cities, implies a certain degree of involvement within global dynamics in all cities, independently from their degree of development or modernity (Robinson, 2006). Contemporary urban theory is dominated by the framework of global cities and world cities. This ecology of globalization pays attention to the circuits of finance capital and informational capital but ignores other circuitries of the world economy. It is not surprising then that global/world cities mapping drops all other

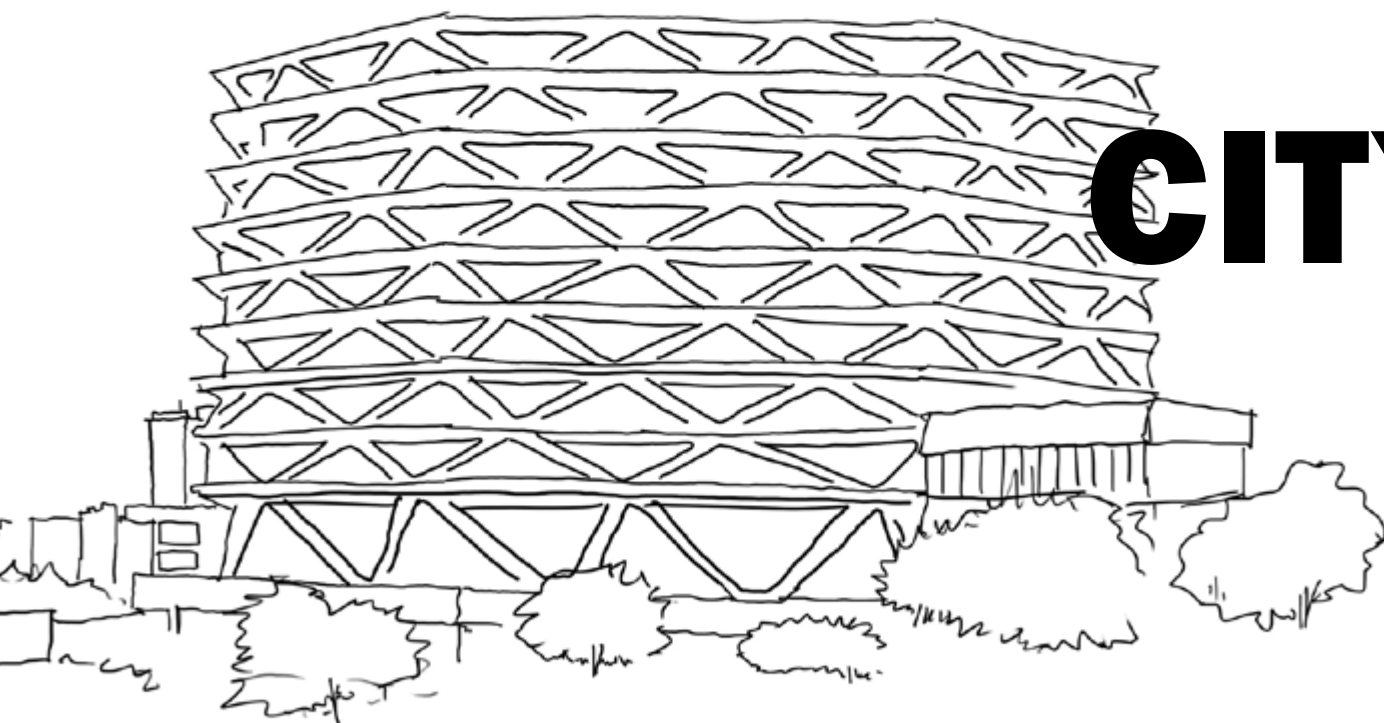
cities from the map, arguing that they are structurally irrelevant to the functioning of economic globalization (Robinson, 2002). Roy suggests that it is now time to rethink the typical core –periphery model of globalization that characterized neo/liberal frameworks and post/ colonial frameworks. In her view, “the 21st- century metropolis arbitrates this geography of multiplicity and differentiation...It is dependent on the circuits of global capital and yet it also produces and mediates these circuits” (Roy, 2009, p. 825).

In time, African cities have been recognized as active elements within the global cities theoretical framework (Olu Abiodun, 1997; van der Merwe, 2004) and today, most contemporary scholars agree upon the fact that previous analyses had been biased towards the West and offered models that did not belong in the African city (Simone, 2004). African cities need to be included in the broader global context, to be examined comparatively and analyzed in a different way, moving beyond the perception that urban Africa is “essentially different from the rest of the world” (Fourchard, 2011, p. 225). While some scholars like van der Merwe have attempted to test the performance of African cities through the evaluation of specific indicators that would ultimately qualify them as ‘global’ (van der Merwe, 2004), others have decided to subvert the mainstream narrative, and to shift their conceptualization altogether. After world cities and global cities, they now turned to ‘ordinary cities.’ This contributed to reset the perspective about the cities of the world, depriving them of any previous categorization and hierarchization, and symbolically move towards a de-Westernizing and post-colonial turn in urban theory (Robinson, 2006).



**3**

# **ACCRA AIRPORT CITY**





Narratives about West African cities, just like those about the African continent, are often split between crisis and development. While the degree and the implications of West African cities urban development are still source of debate, it is established that in the past two decades they have been able to catalyze an incredible amount of international attention from the world of architecture and urban studies. This is testified by the number of exhibitions and publications that have contributed to portray and establish these urban environments as the vanguard of urban experimentation and innovation. The source of such experimentation has almost inextricably been linked to the informal realm. But what about 'formal' urban development? After all, it does represent a consistent and important portion of contemporary West African cities. Is it really so familiar that its dynamics can just be considered as established?

This research focuses on one of the most – at least in theory – formal parts of a West African city: the business district. The place where the tension between global and local forces materializes itself in its architectural and urban form (Grant & Nijman, 2006). This intersection is the result of historical processes that have been in the making for centuries, and is now represented through its forms, its practices and the dynamics that regulate its development.



## 3.1 WEST AFRICAN BUSINESS

West Africa is conventionally made up of 17 countries. It is estimated to have an aggregate population of 245 million with an overall urban population of half of that total. The seven largest countries in the West African group are (in order) Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. The first two are Anglophone; the last five are Francophone countries.

As it has been illustrated in the previous chapter, urbanization has been one of the most powerful, and insistent, phenomena of the early twenty-first century. Nonetheless, unlike most 'developed' countries, urban growth in individual African countries has not always been accompanied by parallel economic growth for the country as a whole.

In an attempt to evaluate the relationship between economic development and urbanization in the West African context, Dickson Eyoh and Richard Stren (2007) calculated the proportion of the total population represented by a particular city, and compared it with an estimate of the proportion of the GNP for that city. The results showed that large cities contribute disproportionately to national income, although they admitted that this alone did not "prove" that the cities were the only factor responsible for that income. Nevertheless, they argued, it is legitimate to assert that, at the very least, cities are a necessary condition for innovation, social change, and economic growth, and West Africa is no exception.

The Western African region has a rich history of urbanization, which preceded colonialism by centuries. Many of the famous precolonial African urban civilizations are found in this group of states: Kumasi in Ghana; Ibadan, Ife, and Benin in the South; and Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto, in Nigeria (Eyoh, 2007).

The current processes and patterns of urbanization have been defined by the establishment of colonial extractive economies and by territorially bounded states. The rapid growth of colonial cities, some of which were built on or replaced preexisting towns and others that were created from scratch, was propelled by rural migrations. (Eyoh, 2007, p. 119)

**Previous page**

Airport City view.

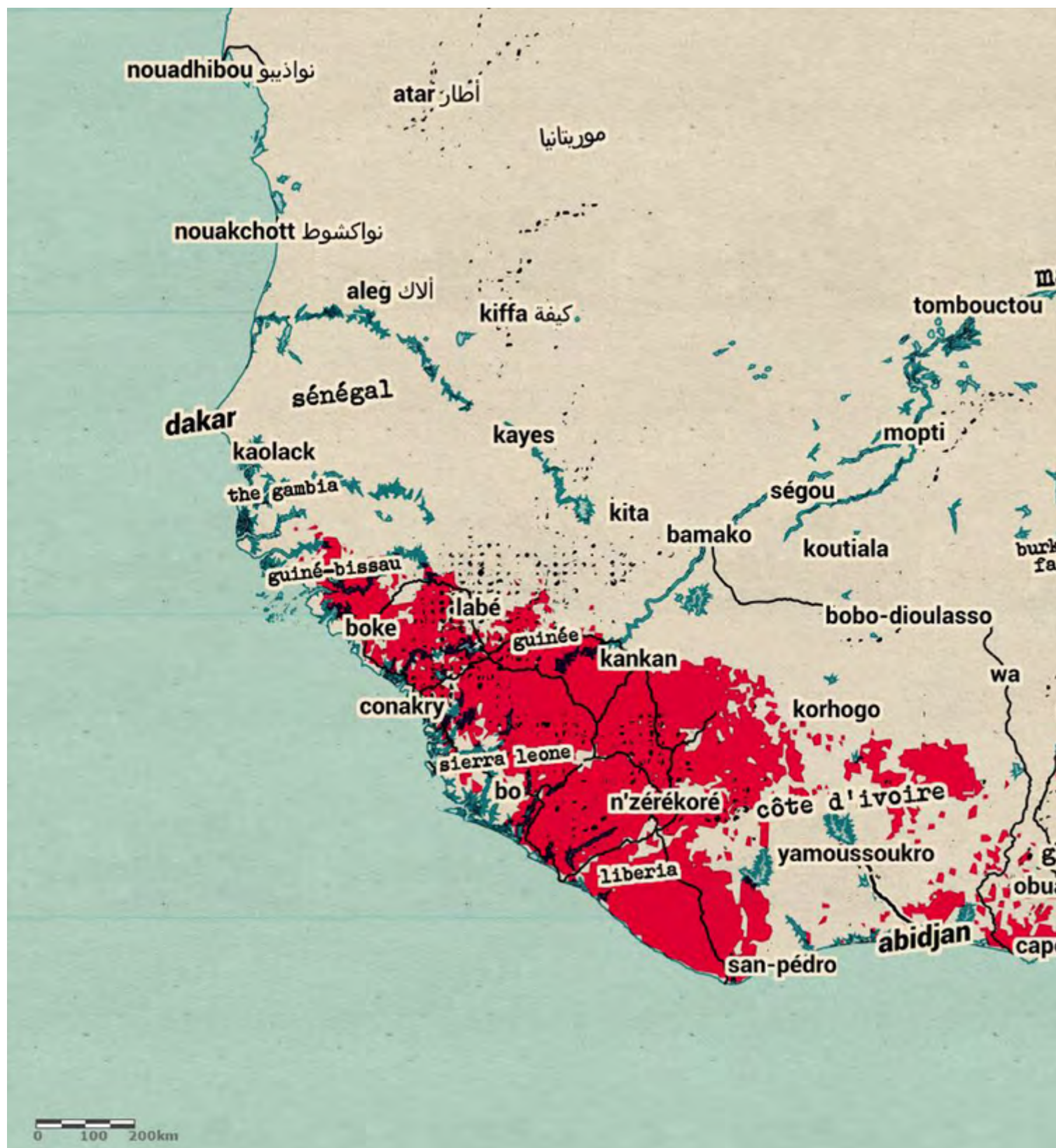
Source: Laurus DP

Migration remains the main source of urbanization in the post-colonial era, even though some suggest the possibility of an inversion of the trend, which now seems to be favoring small and mid-sized cities rather than large ones. A phenomena that has caught the attention of international investors, which are now turning their look beyond the exceptionality of cities like Lagos, in favor of smaller, more controllable environments (Turak, 2015).

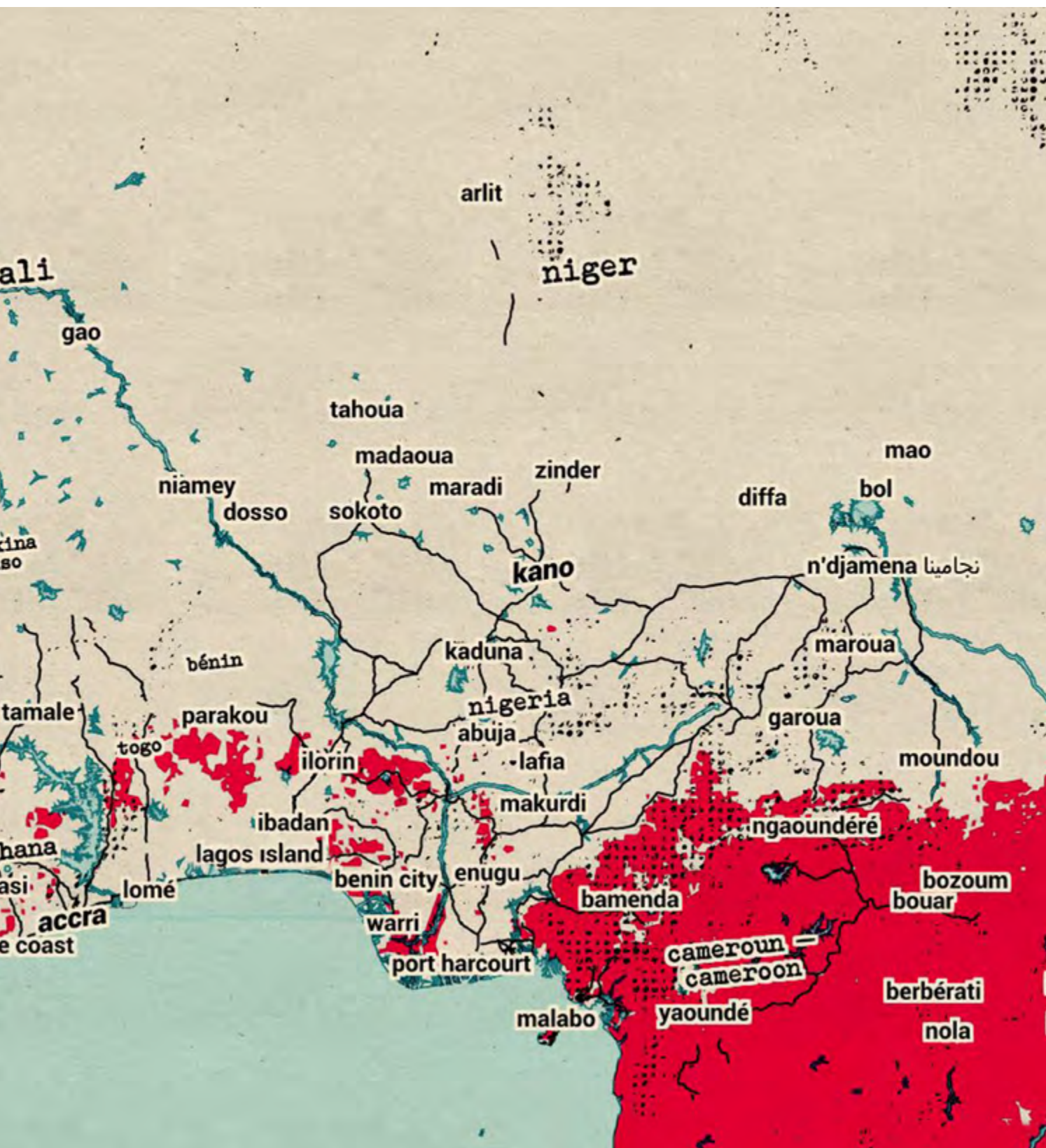
Over the past decade, booming West African cities such as Lagos, Abidjan and Accra have received a great deal of attention and FDI in response to their population growth, economic growth, dynamism and promise (KPMG Africa, 2014b). While these cities remain primary investment destinations, domestic and foreign investors alike are looking for the next big thing – those up-and-coming cities that will rise to prominence ten years from now. KPMG identified two other cities that have started their ascendancy: Ouagadougou and Dakar.

Ouagadougou, or Ouaga for short, in landlocked Burkina Faso, is a city to watch. The country's largest city, with a population of more than 1,086,000, it is the nation's economic, administrative, cultural and communications centre. While it has many hurdles to overcome – such as unemployment and an infrastructure deficit in telecoms, transport and utilities – the feeling is that its promise is weightier than all of this. Burkina currently has the fastest growing gold economy in Africa, and operating costs in the country are low. The flat savannah landscape makes exploration easy. The country is underexplored and its gold deposits as yet largely untapped. The political environment is considered reasonably stable, and the legislative framework enacted in the early 2000's has established a relatively transparent business environment conducive to increased investments. (Ibid.)

On the other hand, Dakar is a true gateway city, strategically located in terms of sea, road and rail links. It has one of the largest deep-water sea-ports along the West African coast, located at the extreme western point of Africa, at the crossroad of the major sea-lanes linking Europe to South America, which makes it a natural port of call for shipping companies. Dakar is also linked to numerous African cities by air, and daily flights go to Europe. The system of roads in Senegal is extensive by West African standards, with paved roads reaching each corner of the country and







all major towns. Dakar is the endpoint of three routes in the Trans-African Highway network: the Cairo-Dakar Highway, the Dakar-Ndjamena Highway, and the Dakar-Lagos Highway.

Dakar, the country's capital, offers investors a relatively stable political environment, democratic institutions, two-day business registration, a relatively robust telecommunications infrastructure, a stable regional currency (the CFA), easy repatriation of capital and income, and abundant semi-skilled and unskilled labour. The city's population is in excess of 1 million.

The country's key export industries at present are phosphate mining, fertiliser production, and commercial fishing. It is also working on iron ore and oil exploration projects. (Ibid.)

These two cities are at the forefront of investment, and represent the 'frontier of the frontier' in a regional context in which even the most established actors still require a great deal of caution to approach. High rewards carry high risks, and in that, no one compares to Lagos.

### **3.1.1. Lagos**

The main port city of the most populous country in Africa, Lagos has benefited greatly from the integration of Nigeria into the world economy. During the colonial and, for a short time also postcolonial periods, a large share of national investment was directed to the city. In the 1970's Nigeria became a wealthy oil state, and as Lagos' economic influence diminished, it became largely neglected by the Federal State. Since then, of the 36 that make up Nigeria, Lagos State has remained the only financially active state. This is mostly due to its government's ability to autonomously generate a substantial amount of its revenue. At the same time, as a consequence of the permanent influx of migrants from the hinterland, the city's population has changed from a marked cosmopolitanism in the 19th century to a significantly more Nigerian one in the 20th century (Fourchard, 2012).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after decades of neglect, the largest metropolis of Sub Saharan Africa found itself under intense critical scrutiny. The new attention did not come so much from development specialists or Africa scholars but from high-profile architectural theory and urban studies critics, which gathered around major international art exhibitions. They focused on the peculiarity and exoticness of the city's

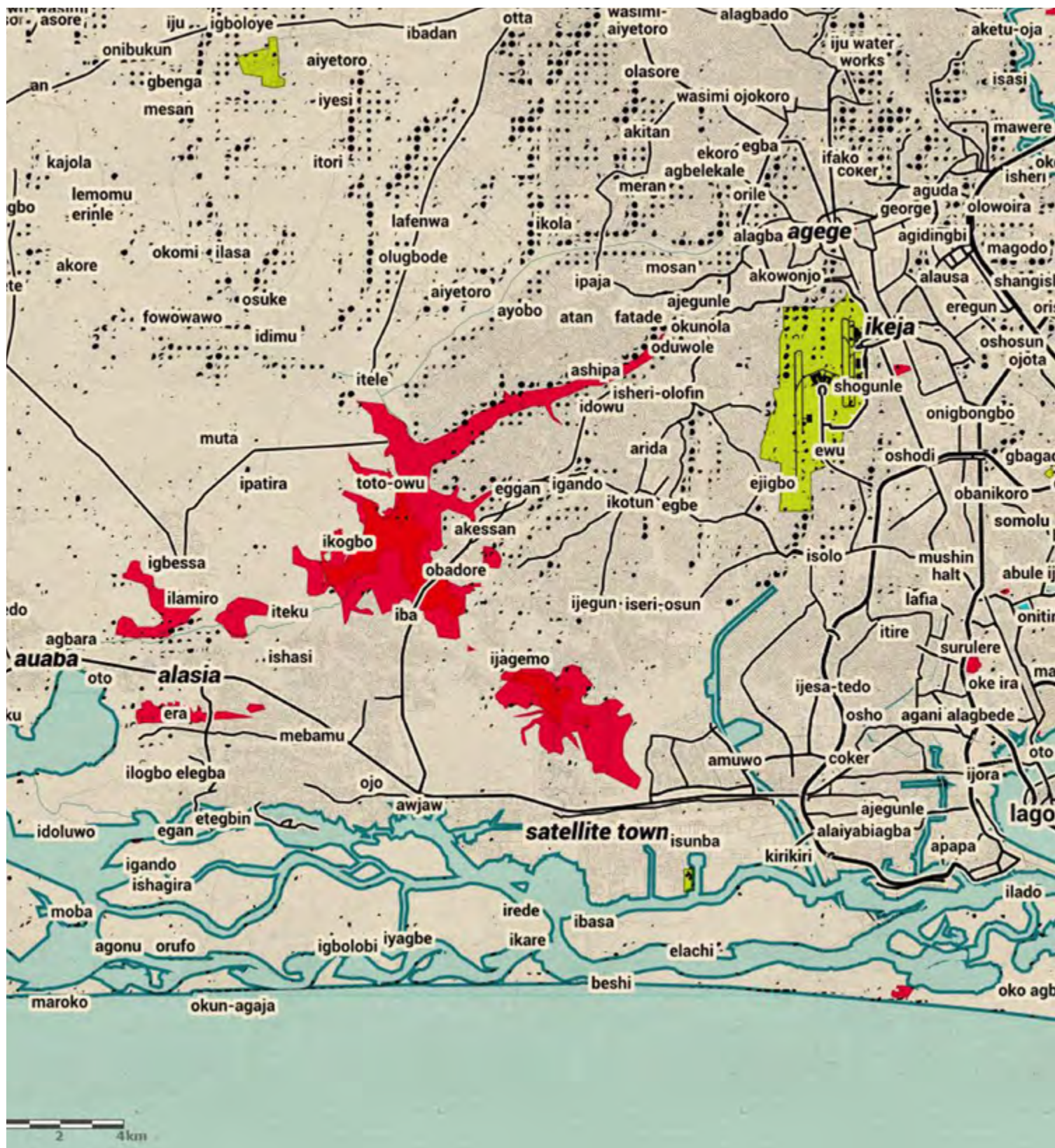
morphology. Exemplified by Rem Koolhaas and the Harvard School of Design's Project on the City, this approach conceptualize and to some extent – aestheticized – the chaotic development of Lagos, highlighting the complexity of the local socio-economic structures, which conceived the city as a series of self-regulatory systems (Koolhaas, Mau, & Werlemann, 1997). Lagos was therefore interpreted not as a threatening anomaly but as the precursor to a new kind of urbanism, which bypassed the discourses of Western modernity to portray a further step in the evolution of the contemporary urban environment. This positivist interpretation was elaborated in direct contrast to the “eschatological evocation of urban apocalypse” advocated by most (Gandy, 2005, p. 38).

Poverty, violence, disease, political corruption, uncontrollable growth and manic religiosity. A city of between perhaps ten and fifteen million (the administrative means to take a reliable census do not exist), with minimal access to running water and sanitation, in which some 70 per cent are excluded from regular salaried employment. In this nightmare vision, the city is on the brink of a cataclysm brought about by civil strife and infrastructural collapse. (Ibid.)

In these accounts, Lagos appears as irrecoverable in an inverse of the globalization thesis, in which certain regions are seen as totally excluded from the reconfigured world economic system. Lagos is simultaneously growing, dividing, polarizing and decaying. For the most part, the metropolitan area has developed independently of the efforts of city planners, in a process that Gandy defines as ‘amorphous urbanism’ (Gandy, 2005, p. 52).

Public services such as road repairs, waste collection and water supply are so poor that municipal taxes can scarcely be justified. Eroded modes of service provision persist as a ghostly palimpsest of structures: rusted postboxes, the twisted remains of parking meters and other accoutrements of an abandoned modernity litter the urban landscape. Lagos is dominated by forbidding concrete structures, devoid of the classic motifs of urban beautification or traces of nature. (Gandy, 2005, p. 52)











Its scale, the poverty rates and ethnic polarization represent real obstacles to the reconstruction of the city's social and physical fabric. Despite the fact that informal networks and settlements may meet some immediate needs and bottom-up community organization may produce measurable improvements, grassroots responses alone cannot coordinate the structural dimensions of urban development (Olu Abiodun, 1997). To comprehend the current challenges facing a city like Lagos one must move beyond the interpretation of urban planning as the principal organizational principle of the modern city:

In a European or North American context, the emergence of urban planning, new modes of municipal administration and the development of integrated technological networks for water, energy and other services became part of a nexus of institutional reforms associated with the transformation of the industrial metropolis. These developments held at their core a tension between the need to secure a degree of political legitimacy in the service of an ostensible public interest and at the same time a need to co-ordinate and rationalise the morphology of space in order to facilitate economic activity. The very idea of 'planning' denotes the possibility of influencing or directing different sets of developments, but the periodic aspirations of successive colonial and post-colonial administrations in Lagos to improve the morphology and structure of urban space have had minimal impact: we encounter a metropolitan region which reflects the steady accretion of human decision making outside of or in contradiction with stated goals and objectives. (Gandy, 2006 p.388)

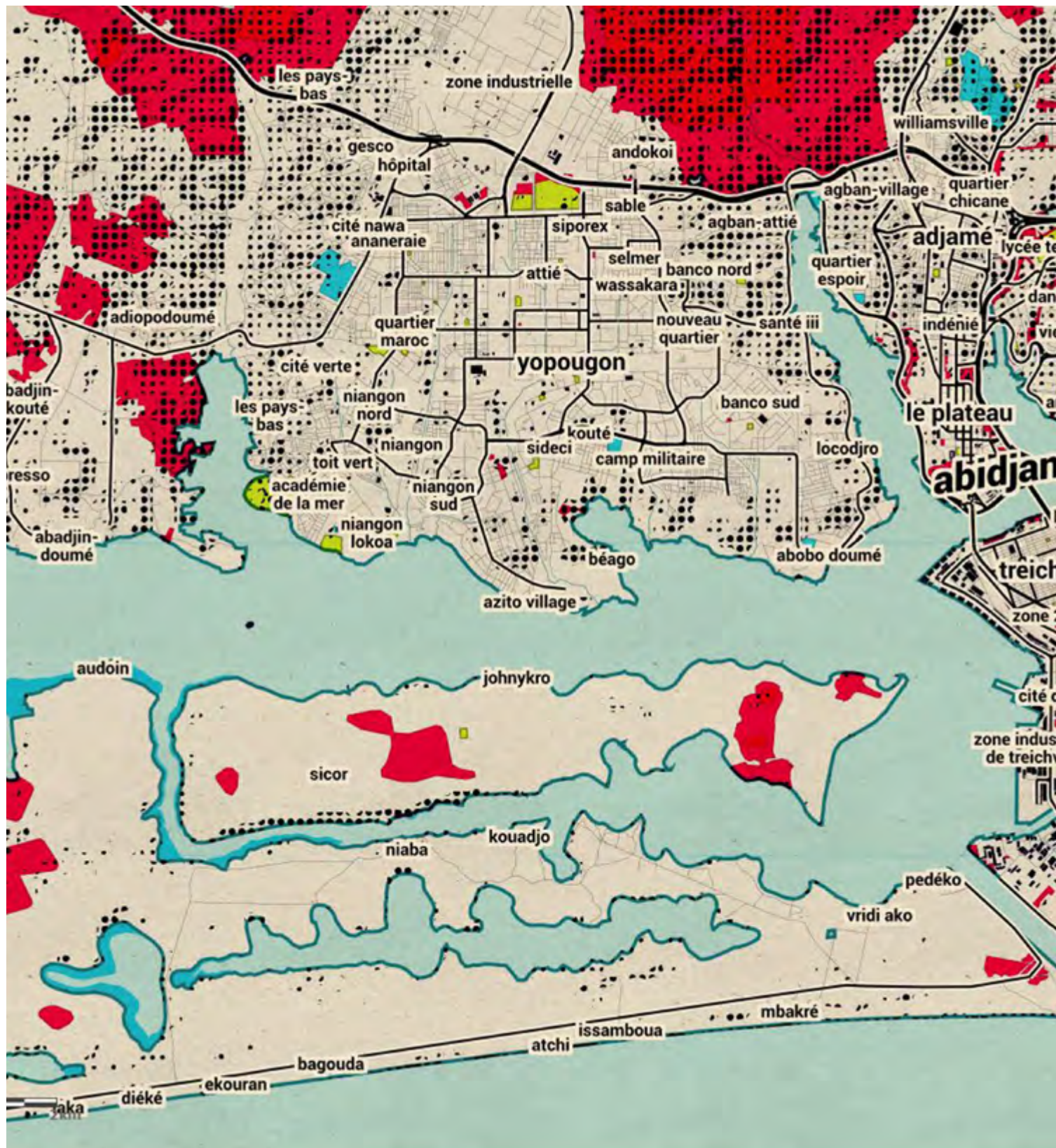
Considered from a planning or architectural point of view, much of the city's topography does not represent any design conception beyond the expression of local construction methods of self-built individual dwellings. A spontaneous landscape in which an uncoordinated and incremental assemblage of structures has gradually spread across all the available space. Lagos is growing, and yet, it is hard to compare it to other rapidly growing (and similarly sized) global cities from India or Asia. It is different because the city is growing rapidly, but in a context of economic stagnation. As Gandy argues:

Appeals to various forms of 'African exceptionalism' serve to contain the city within a category of ontological difference whilst obscuring the relationship between urban design and any meaningful forms of social or political deliberation. If we perceive Lagos to be a model for the future on account of the city's capacity to function in spite of its ostensible lack of coordination or planning, we risk condemning much of the city's population to continuing hardship. (Ibid. p.390)

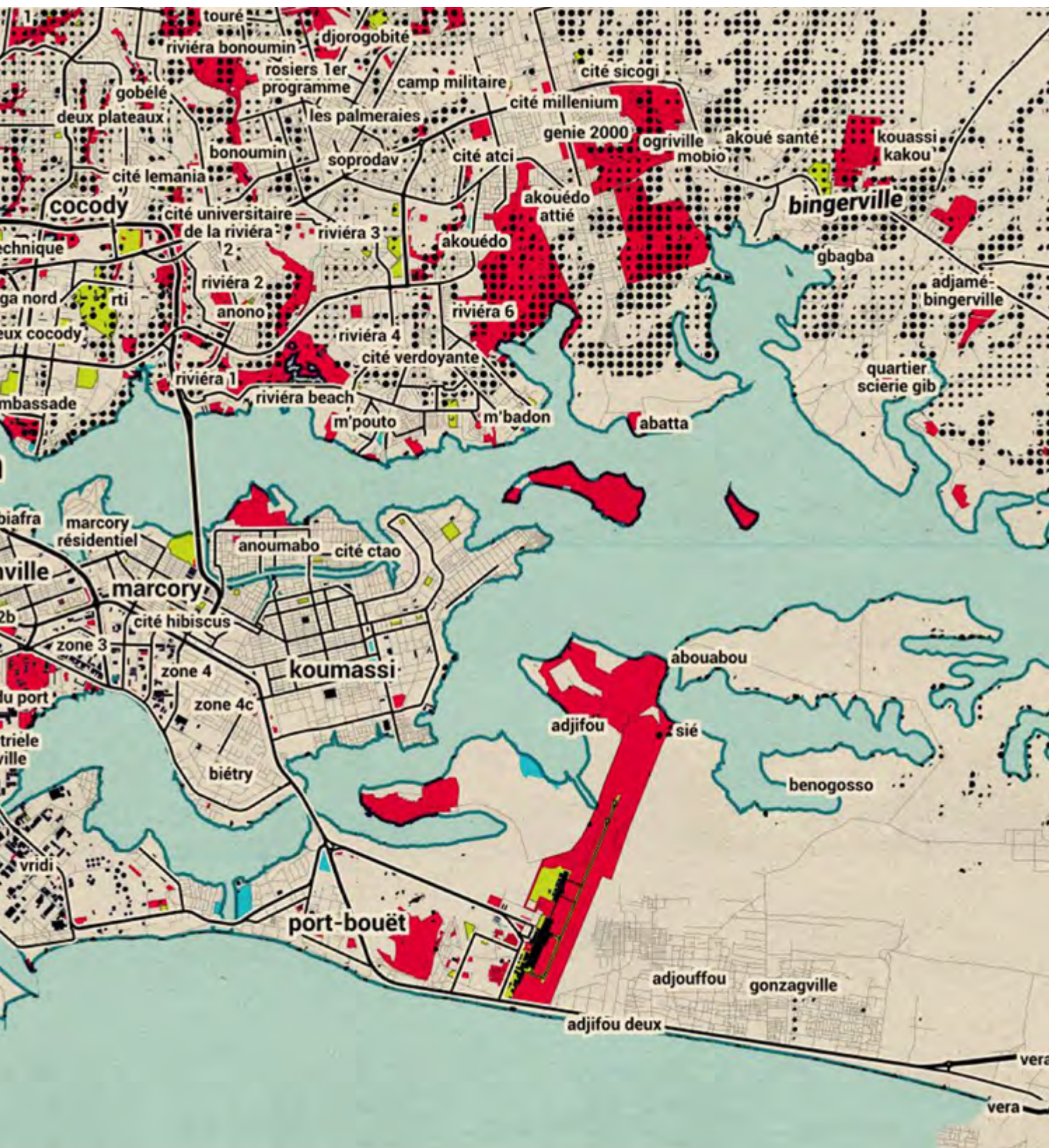
On the other hand, approaching the city's own declination of urbanization within a de-hierarchized (and possibly de-westernized) framework would enable it to effectively dialogue with other fast-growing cities, allowing for an effective analysis and interpretation of its current issues. The city's infrastructure crisis, for example, is clearly a complex political and economic phenomenon factors, which transcends its regional and possibly continental borders. Similarly, the fragmentation of its civil is not a peculiarly African experience. It is only through the identification of commonalities, which transcend emerging patterns of social, ethnic and religious polarization, that Lagos – and other similar cities – can begin the complex task of reconstruction and the development of new and more legitimate modes of public administration.

### **3.1.2. Abidjan**

Abidjan is currently positioned to become the francophone regional hotspot. Pushed by infrastructure investment rather than by commodities export, the capital of Cote d'Ivoire seems to be on the path for future growth and stability. After the civil war in 2009-2011, elections in 2015 went smoothly, with a solid confirmation for the actual president, Alassane Ouattara, to lead the country for the next four years. Since 2012, a new bridge was built, power production was improved through the construction of two electric plants and plans are in the works for the construction of a surface train line. Ironically, as Accra's economy stalled during the oil crisis, Abidjan experienced an economic boom thanks to its investment in infrastructure and public reform, and seems to be well on its way towards regaining its role of one of the major commercial and business hubs in West Africa.







Ivory Coast is investing heavily on its transport infrastructure, including roads and an expansion for the port of Abidjan over the next few years. Communication to potential investors has also become a top priority for the current government, reaching out to foreign companies and enterprises, to foster investment in the country through 5-year tax benefits, VAT exemption and so on. Notably, these initiatives are not limited to the territory of the capital Abidjan, but to other regions, like the San Pedro area, close to the Liberian border. This comes as a positive signal for the overall stability of the country.

The history of Abidjan is closely tied to that of the Ivory Coast and the building of the nation. For many decades, Abidjan was the physical manifestation of the projections of a technocratic urbanism that claimed to be global and systematized, and that needed to correspond to people's idea of a modern society. No other city became a promotional sample for modernity the same way; hence, the city served as a showcase for Western society in Africa and for seemingly successful urban liberalism. The steel and glass towers attested to the city's *savoir-faire* and its mastery of modern tools for building a city. (Chenal, 2014, p. 61)

Abidjan was built to be both a showcase and a blueprint for a modern society (Steck, 2005). Urban policy was the instrument of this development strategy. It reflected economic growth through the use of a modern architecture and the construction of prestigious structures (Chenal, 2014). Since its inception, Abidjan was ethnically mixed, as its economic development largely depended on rural as well as urban laborers both from the countryside and from other cities in the region (Dubresson, 1997). Abidjan's population profile changed noticeably in sixty years. The urban archetype of the young, unmarried, male immigrant that once characterized the city has today been replaced by three-generation family units (Couret, 1997). In 1928, Abidjan saw its first urban development plan: the development plan for the city of Abidjan. This document set out to make Abidjan a modern city. The main goal of the plan was to zone the territory. Many more followed: the Badini Plan of 1952, which turned Abidjan, the administrative/residential city, into Abidjan, the port/ industrial/commercial city, thanks to the construction of the Vridi Canal. The Plan32 of 1960, attempted to thwarting north-south development in favor of an east-west axis, and favoring building housing

close to employment areas. The Schéma de structure (structure diagram] of 1969. The AURA Plan of 1974. In 1977, the “Ten-year outlook on development in Abidjan: 1979-1988” was prematurely interrupted by the crisis of the early 1980’s. Finally, the last and current plan has applied through various iteration since 1994.

The country has never relived the economic glory and the liberalism years that followed its independence. The economic crisis continues, and living conditions continue to deteriorate. The 2008 food riots in Dakar, Douala, and Abidjan among other cities, and the recent disorders provoked by some sectors of the army, are just a reminder of the fragility of its relatively recent economic improvement. Furthermore, Abidjan is still plagued by environmental problems: the lagoon is dying, land pressure is weighing more and more heavily on protected sites, such as the Banco Forest, and untreated waste is accumulating in neighborhoods. No plan seems to have been drafted to deal with these problems proactively (Chenal, 2014).

Two historical elements strongly shaped the city. The first was the search for an urban form that made it possible to combat mosquitoes, and the second was the economic model adopted at the state level. Without caricaturing these two situations, we can nonetheless see a shift from a vision of technical, hygienic, and engineering-based urban planning to a symbolic vision of the city as a showcase for modernity and a symbol of the state. Rarely has the state been as present as in Abidjan post-1960; the city was planned based on a political ideology and a state economic system that played all roles: planner, regulator, and sometimes even entrepreneur in major housing programs, in this shift from a technical model to a symbolic one, there was a loss of functional aspects of the city that, while they were sometimes devised brutally (like a set of obstacles to be dealt with) maintained firm footing in the regional and environmental contexts. But this system that we call symbolic is no less than a technological vision based on high standards. Are not numerous and highly-restrictive constraints the prerogative of modern man? In this way, the technical vision was replaced by the technological vision, and behind the idea that good urban development (i.e. the recipe for a good city) is one that can pride itself on having high building and infrastructure standards. (Chenal, 2014, p. 75)

In 2015, Cote d'Ivoire has started work on a major Chinese-backed project to expand the port in the country's commercial capital. China, which is contributing 85% of the costs of the \$1.12 billion project, said the aim is to turn the port into a major maritime transport hub for West Africa. Work will include deepening the Vridi canal, which links Abidjan's Ebrie lagoon to the Gulf of Guinea, and building a second container terminal to increase cargo capacity. The new container terminal will increase the port's existing processing capacity of twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) containers 1.2 million per year to TEU 3 million per year by 2020.

The port, which started operations in 1951, is one of Africa's busiest in terms of volume and serves as a major international trans-shipment and transit traffic hub, through which 70% of the foreign trade of hinterland countries including Burkina Faso and Mali passes. Cote d'Ivoire is among several countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are expected to see faster economic growth than any other region by 2040, according to a report by professional services firm PwC, which defined Abidjan as one of the 'next 10' cities in the region where foreign investors will be attracted to the "untapped potential" of opportunities (Pinsent Masons, 2015).

China is already backing a program of infrastructure modernization in Cote d'Ivoire that includes the construction of hospitals, completion of the Abidjan-Grand Bassam expressway, building a sports stadium, completing the Soubre hydroelectric dam in the country's southwest region and building an industrial zone in Abidjan.

### **3.1.3. Accra**

Accra was founded by the Ga as a small coastal fishing village in the sixteenth century. Shortly after, Europeans arrived in Ghana and sparked the first hint of urban growth by building trading forts and castles on the coast (Grant, 2009, p. 24). Accra's development declined with the abolition of the slave trade shifted to agricultural export. Accra's declining fortunes were revived in 1877, when it was chosen as the headquarters of British administration on the Gold Coast. Its advantages outweighed its disadvantages: Accra was both malaria-free and less affected by sleeping sickness. This consolidated and secured Accra's future development (Yankson & Bertrand, 2012). Accra was chosen as the seaward terminus

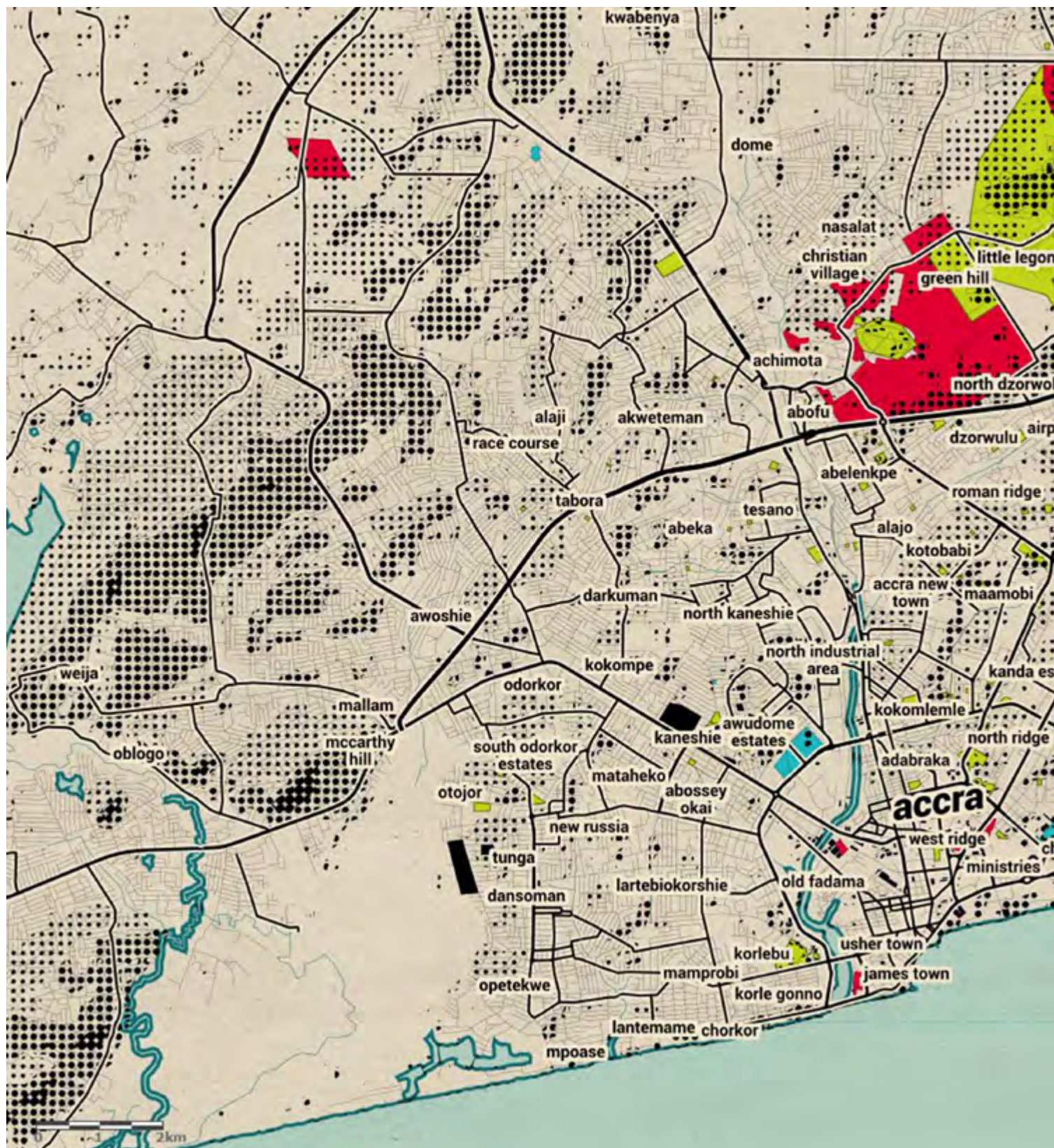


of the eastern railway and became the focus of the road system in the east, consequently reinforcing its position as a port. The port remained the epicenter of all activities with its docks, warehouses and railway terminals. Colonial administration's buildings and military bases were all located nearby, and it became the starting point for the establishment of a regular urban pattern, which was gradually super-imposed over the existing non-planned city (Brand, 1972). Improvement in accessibility expanded Accra's sphere of influence, and hence, its growth. Accra experienced a rapid rate of growth: The population of Accra in 1901 was approximately 18,000; by 1970 it was 35 times as large (Bobo, 1974, p. 71). Industrialization and economic activity contributed to the growth of the metropolitan area, attracting people to settle and work in Accra. The city's early rapid growth, however, occurred without the benefit of physical planning (Yankson & Bertrand, 2012).

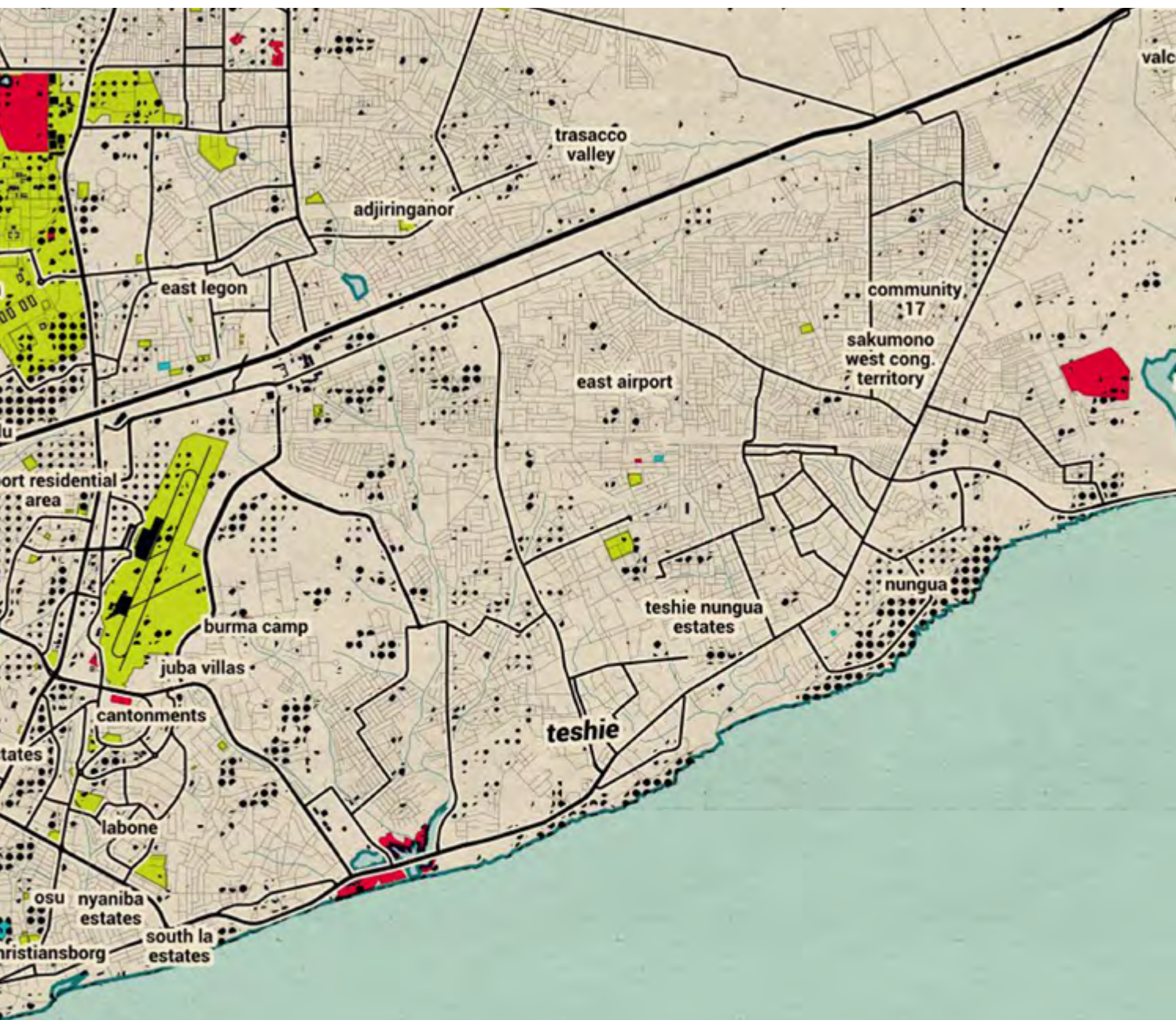
Accra's center comprised a series of compact masses of thatched buildings arranged in haphazard manner and separated by narrow crooked lanes. From the very beginning, two spatial sub-systems developed side by side. These consisted, on one hand, of well-planned European residential areas, around which clustered the houses of a few wealthy Accra merchants and, on the other, a mass of unplanned indigenous quarters. This rapid growth was also accompanied by very serious sanitation problems. This was partly the result of weak urban administration and management practices. However, improvement measures were taken by the British, including sanitation in 1885. Under the Town Council Ordinance of 1894, the Accra Municipal Council was formed in 1898. However, for reasons of poor finance, the Council could not provide adequate municipal services. The people refused to pay municipal rates. It was not until the bubonic plague of 1907 that the inhabitants came to appreciate the need for municipal services. (Ibid.)

The biggest impetus to Accra's growth and development, however, came after independence, when an urban-driven development strategy was pursued by the government of post-independence Ghana (Hubbard, 1925, p. 21). In the early years of independence, a modernization strategy based on industrialization led to several initiatives, which positively influenced the development of Accra. These new steps included the de-









velopment of a new port and new township at Tema, twenty kilometers to the east of Accra, the creation of a new industrial estate in Accra and the rapid expansion of government offices within Accra.

The economic downturn that affected Ghana between the 1970's and the mid-1980's affected Accra in many respects, not least the mass emigration from Accra-Tema and other large towns to neighboring countries, particularly Nigeria (Ibid.). This affected employment opportunities in the formal sector of the economy and had an effect on the growth rate of the population. With the implementation of Economic Recovery Programme (ERP)/Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1983, new life was injected into the economy of Accra in both the formal and informal sectors, restarting population growth.

This rapid growth, however, has not had the benefit of consistent and coordinated planning. Consequently, Accra's growth turned out to be fragmented (Larbi, 1996), with an amorphous and largely inefficient urban form.

The construction around Accra has been so extensive that the boundaries between AMA and the surrounding districts are blurring. The Strategic Plan for GAMA, developed in the early 1990's with the help of the World Bank has not been fully implemented. The current administrative division of GAMA into three separate and independent districts has further impeded spatial planning. It also means that AMA has different planning elements and priorities than the largely peri-urban districts. Much of the development in peri-urban Accra is taking place before any planning scheme has been prepared. In fact, no detailed plan has been prepared for the peri-urban districts, which have been neglected by planners and aid agencies alike with severe consequences for the environment. (Yankson & Bertrand, 2012)

Today, Accra has a total land area of 201 km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of about 1.8 million people, according to the 2010 census. This makes it one of the most populated and fast growing Metropolis in Africa with an annual growth rate of 4.3% (da Cruz, Sommer, & Tempa, 2006). Accra is a major center for manufacturing, marketing, finance, insurance, transportation and tourism. As an urban economy, the ser-

vice sector is the largest, employing about 531,670 people with the informal service sub-sector absorbing the largest number of labour force in the sector.

Ghana is widely regarded as a successful model of multi-party democracy in Africa. The country has an active legislature with a strong and credible political opposition; an independent judiciary; growing, free and vibrant media that provide extensive coverage of public affairs and fierce debate of political issues; and an assertive civil society. Among its defining features is the conduct of successive, relatively free and fair competitive multi-party elections, with peaceful transfers of power (Awal & Paller, 2016). In that sense, Accra is a particular city in West Africa, being the capital of the second state after Cape Verde with the longest period of uninterrupted democracy in the region, dating back to 1992.

From 2007 to 2014, the country has seen great GDP growth, both thanks to the discovery of oil on its coast and its strategic role for business in the region, which has led to a new wave of urban development, that kickstarted the development of the Airport City business district. The Ghanaian economy grew by an average of 8.2% p.a. during 2008-13 and private consumption expenditure expanded by a mean of 7.5% p.a. The country's growing middle class has attracted many international brands to its shopping malls and is seeing a westernization of shopping trends. According to Atterbury MD James Ehlers, "Accra is the hub of retail in the country, yet modern shopping malls still represent a small proportion of Accra's retail market. With its growing prosperity and population, Accra has great capacity to support more formal retail" (KPMG Africa, 2014a).

The World Bank's report *Poverty Reduction in Ghana: Progress and Challenges* (Molini & Paci, 2015), shows that sustained and inclusive growth in the last twenty years has allowed Ghana to more than halve its poverty rate, from 52.6% to 21.4% between 1991 and 2012. The impact of rapid growth on poverty has been far stronger in Ghana than elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, until 2005 for every 1% increase in GDP in Ghana, the incidence of poverty fell by 2.5% — far above the sub-Saharan average of 1.6% (Ibid.). This remarkable achievements in poverty reduction were made possible by diversifying the economy beyond agriculture, while improving access to basic services, including education, health and electricity. This is reflected in the raising skill-set and educational attainment of the Ghanaian labour force, which has







become increasingly mobile as the economy continues to shift out of agriculture and rapid urbanization encourages greater employment in services and, to a lesser extent, industry. Meanwhile, improvements in agricultural productivity, driven in particular by cocoa and other cash crops, have facilitated structural transformation, though the sector remains the main source of employment in the country.

The “Ghanaian economic miracle” might have been due to the advent of the radio<sup>1</sup>, but the radio did not save it from the economic crisis of 2014, when as a consequence of the oil crisis and bad management, the country went to the IMF asking for help on the eve of what was meant to be its coming-out party, the inaugural US-Africa Summit in August 2014.

Up to then, Ghana had been the star pupil of the “Africa Rising” narrative – a virtuous cycle of good governance and economic growth. Ghana was the example that it is possible to implement both socio-economic rights and political rights posting 8% GDP growth rate, as happened between 2007 and 2012, while maintaining a vibrant democracy (Marfo, 2014).

The government anticipated too much revenue from its recently found oil reserves and overspent. The money was used not on infrastructure and education that would lift long-term potential growth. It was frittered away paying higher salaries to civil servants. It is a classic example of mismanagement, and one that demonstrates that while progress has been real, strong and widespread in Africa, there remain plenty of traditional fragilities. Investors need a cautious approach to the “rising” mantra. (Ibid.)

Public-sector pay accounted last year for nearly 65 per cent of Ghana’s total tax revenue after the public wage bill jumped roughly 75 per cent over two and a half years. Revenues have not kept pace, jacking up the fiscal deficit, which last year it hit more than 10 per cent of gross domestic product. Interest rates have soared and the currency, the cedi, has

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1 As New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman is cited to have said at the time of Rawlings’ defeat, pointing out how the four most democratic West African countries at that time – Benin, Ghana, Mali and Senegal – all had vibrant and independent radio stations, therefore urging the international community to stop delivering lectures on democracy to Africa. “Let’s instead make all aid...all loans...all debt relief conditional on African governments’ permitting free FM radio stations. Africans will do the rest” (Marfo, 2012).

#### **Previous spread**

Left: Hope City rendering, Accra.

Source: Hope City

Right: Informal settlements, Accra.

Source: Frans Lanting

plunged nearly 40 per cent this year (Blas, 2014), “making it the world’s worst-performing currency ahead even of the Ukrainian hryvnia and the Syrian pound” (FT View, 2014).

To counter the crisis, the country has implemented many politically difficult measures to rein in spending, including a freeze of public sector salaries and hiring, an increase in value added tax rates and subsidy cuts, which have contributed to re-ignite the economy. In 2013, a panel of local experts and authorities gathered in a public discussion to address the city’s issues. As Victoria Okoye reports:

In Accra, certain neighborhoods are growing, changing, evolving, and the result is a “new face” for the city. But these changes come with their own challenges, and in the urban space, these changes must work within specific limits. The well-known challenge in Accra is the challenge of working with – or around – the city’s outdated planning controls and policies. (Okoye, 2013)

At the time, the issues that emerged were:

- The role of indigenous culture/space: There’s an extreme spatial conflict between existing indigenous communities (Ga) in the city and ongoing (often upscale) urban renovation (gentrification) and development;
- Planning for pedestrians: The need for pedestrian urban master plans that integrate transport transfers between modes and sidewalk infrastructure to make the city more walkable;
- Greenbuilding: Developing locally, context-specific interior design: “All I see is concrete, concrete everywhere, and for me, it tells of a constipation of the mind...There’s no creativity. We have all these beautiful elements that is not tapped. You enter a building in a tropical country, and the building is totally sealed up in concrete and you have all these air cons working and we’re complaining that there isn’t enough electricity?” (Nana Kofi Acquah, from the conference panel, 2013);



- New economic opportunities in the city: Why not create Accra and Ghana as a boxing capital of the world, one panelist proposed. Every two years, bringing the boxing world to Accra to celebrate the sport and bring local economic development and tourism;
- Urban revitalization through infrastructure development: Revitalizing the city's infrastructure can drive the city's development: urban transport, moving from reliance on taxis and trotros<sup>2</sup> to more large-scale options, as well as the sewer system, improved water supply and power. Additionally, redesigning urban transport stops (trotro stops) to avoid increases in traffic congestion, and developing rail transport as a means of alleviating traffic congestion;
- Diversifying the skills, outlooks of architects (and other built environment professionals): Urban practitioners need to expand into new roles — the thinker, the researcher, the artist; expand beyond this discipline to imagine new ways to see and understand the city. The city needs technicians and pragmatists as well as artists, to create and implement innovative solutions;
- Private sector role in development: As with many trends throughout African cities, the private sector is playing a larger and larger role, in the context of developing satellite cities and housing estates, new roads and sewer systems;

Accra's urban development well symbolizes its being at the same time global, a place where multinational companies and international businesses seek to establish themselves, and local, as the process to achieve this remains subject to very specific local traits. The issues that characterize its urban environment are many and diverse, and their solution carries the possibility to unlock the great value potential of the city.

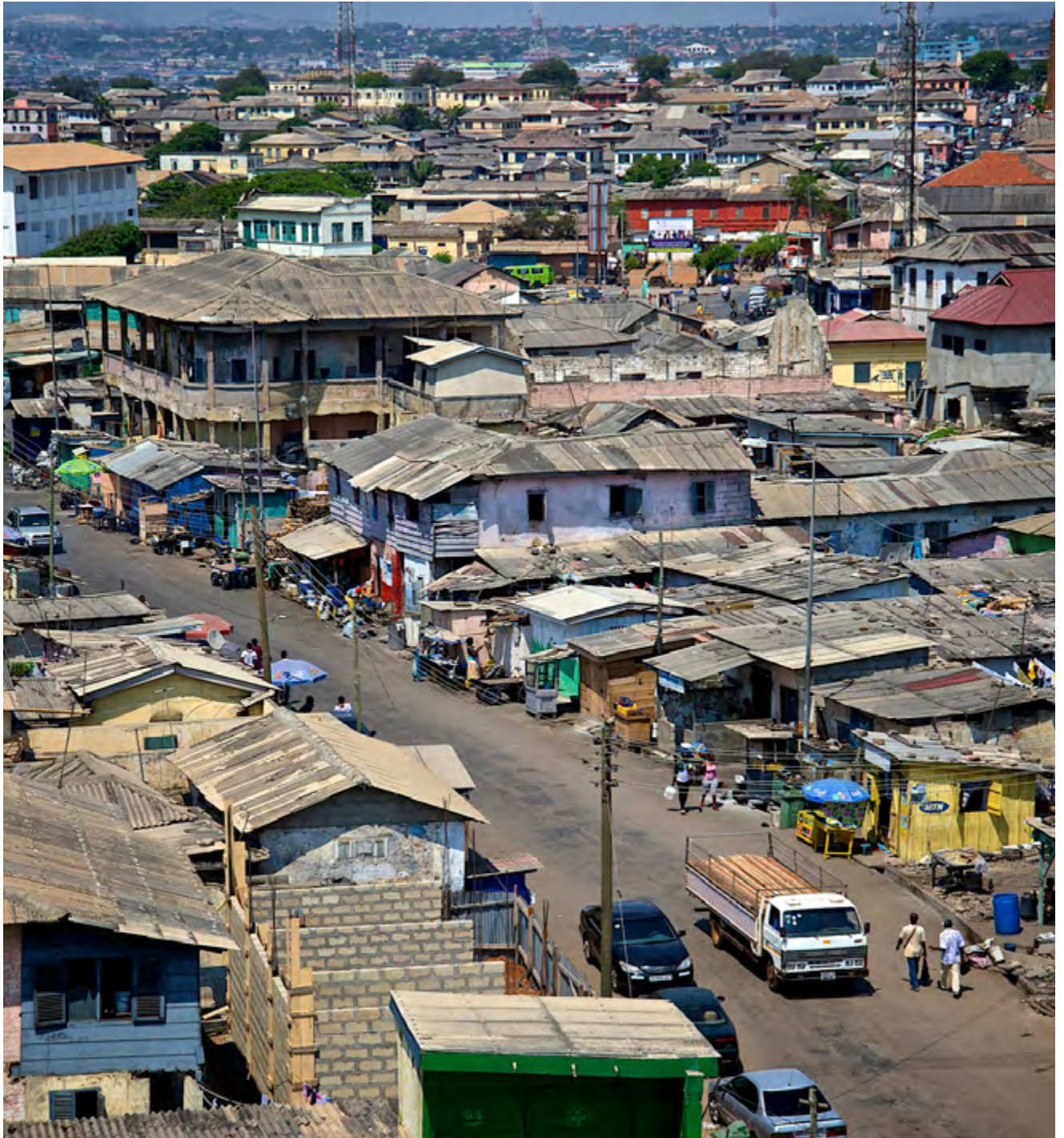
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2 Local minibuses.

**Right page**

Jamestown, Accra.

Source: Accra/Albany MC program



## 3.2 BACKGROUND

### 3.2.1. From Port to Airport

Accra's first Central Business District (CBD) was located next to the port, hosting a wide variety of activities, from trading to distribution, transportation, banking and insurance. The urban pattern and architectural style of the district were kept under strict control, ensuring an "orderly European character and atmosphere" (Grant, 2009, p. 24). Local markets were instead located in a separate "Native Town," which incorporated both commercial and residential areas and was scarcely regulated in terms of urban planning, resulting in a generally congested, unhealthy and infrastructure-deficient area (Quayson, 2014). The European and the Native towns were physically separated by a green barrier that was kept free from any building and served as buffer between the two areas. Urban plans of the time clearly express an intention towards segregation, which could be obtained through the implementation of physical or geographical barriers (such as differences in elevation between the areas, as is the case for the Cantonments neighborhood).

Nonetheless, with the gradual increase of local participation in the economy and the subsequent increase in the population, these barriers became more blurred, and the country's independence ultimately abolished any regulations in that direction, eliminating any discrimination between domestic and foreign citizens and companies. Gradually, foreign presence decreased, and by the 1980's there was only a modest foreign presence in the urban economy of Accra (Grant, 2009, p. 26).

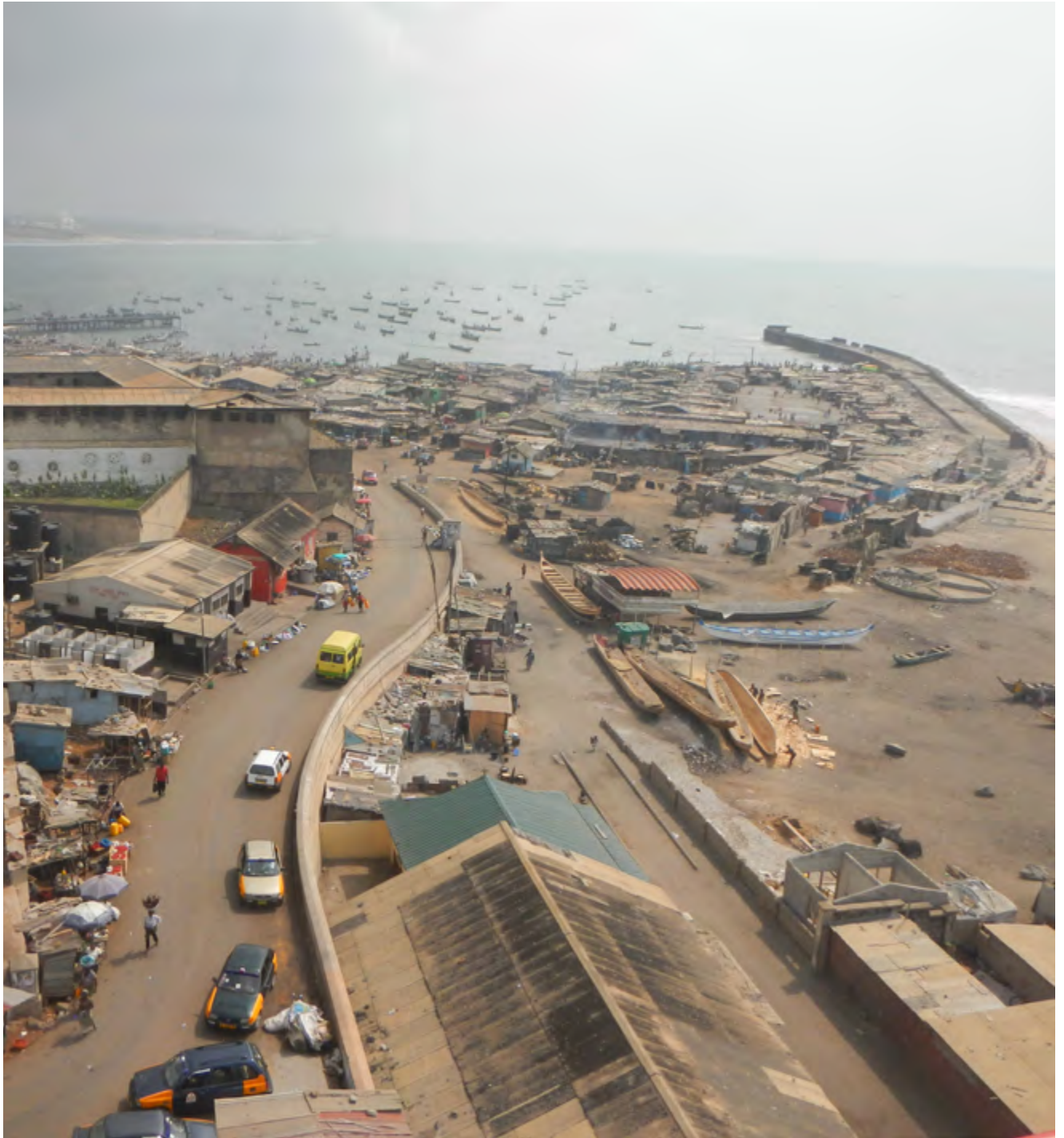
In the 1990's, as the political situation stabilized, the commercial Real Estate market began to grow again, although the confusion in the land-holding systems (which often overlapped between traditional and national authorities) determined a scarcity of available land in the city center. Adding to that was the fact that in 1962, commercial activities had been transferred to the nearby port-city of Tema, which was structurally more fit to host the expansion in the country's international commerce.

Therefore, the city's center of gravity began to shift gradually towards the new connection hub: the airport. Despite its historical value and potential as a tourist destination, (Ghana's coast counts 28 World Heritage

**Opposite page**

Accra, Jamestown port.





Sites<sup>3</sup>), the traditional CBD located in Ussher Town is neglected and in a state of decay (Mills-Tettey & Adi-Dako, 2002). Traffic congestion, poor maintenance and overpopulation have led to its dismissal from most foreign companies. Despite its close proximity with the Ministry area – where the bulk of government buildings are still located – the CBD started to expand towards the central Ridge area, a much more accessible area, where the presence of notable developments such as the World Trade Center and the Mövenpick Hotel had begun to attract vast numbers of businesses. Nonetheless, the radial expansion of the city, due to the scarcity of land in the center, resulted in the development of most of the wealthy residential areas on the outskirts of Accra. Commuting times increased considerably for the new generation of businesspersons and expats, who now resided in the northern parts of the city, in newly developed residential areas such as East Legon. As maritime traffic and light industry were transferred to Tema, the airport became the hub for the city's international connections, its location being strategic also thanks to the proximity with the highway that connects it to the port and the rest of the coast. Airport City was ultimately identified as the next destination for foreign companies and its planning and development began.

Airport city is only the latest of the city's business districts, which were first located around the port and High Street, which followed the coastline, connecting the commercial Osu, with the historical area of Jamestown. Towards the end of colonial times, the increasing need for both residential and commercial real estate led to the expansion of the Ridge area north of the port, whose commercial activities had in the meantime been transferred to the nearby city of Tema. The proximity with the Ministry area, where the bulk of government buildings are still located, characterized the Ridge as one of the prime destinations for business in the city. Nonetheless, the radial expansion of the city resulted in the development of most of the wealthy residential areas on the outskirts of historical Accra. Commuting times increased considerably for the new generation of businesspersons and expats that were not based in the traditional semi-central residential neighborhoods. As maritime traffic was transferred to Tema, the airport became the hub for the city's international connections, its location being strategic also thanks to the proximity with the highway that connects it to the rest of the coast.

<sup>3</sup> Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/34>



**Above**

Airport City, in 2010 and 2013.  
Source: Laurus DP



The shift towards Airport city began in correspondence with the country's economic boom in 2007 when the country discovered crude on its shores. It also roughly coincided with the deterioration of the political situation in Ivory Coast, which forced many investors and companies to relocate elsewhere in the region. This combination of factors led to a prompt increase in the demand for quality commercial real estate.

In 2016, despite the economic headwinds, the situation seems to have somehow stabilized, and Ghana still represents an appealing destination for foreign investors, attracting more than 3 million US \$ in foreign direct investments (EY, 2015).

In 2007, the planning of the Airport City Central Business District symbolized the beginning of a new era for Accra and Ghana, in which they consolidated their position at global level both as an economic player and as destination for international businesses (Mills-Tettey & Adi-Dako, 2002). The area was strategically located in direct vicinity of the airport and the newly built residential areas of Airport residential and East Legon. In a context traditionally plagued by infrastructural issues, it provided a clean slate to plan and develop a completely new business district. Between 2007 and 2014, up to 20 new developments were planned and built, including three hotels, one shopping mall and a number of commercial buildings. According to market data, rent prices almost doubled, going from 22\$ to 40\$ per square meter, while in the rest of the city prices remained stable at around 30 \$/sqm (first-hand data).

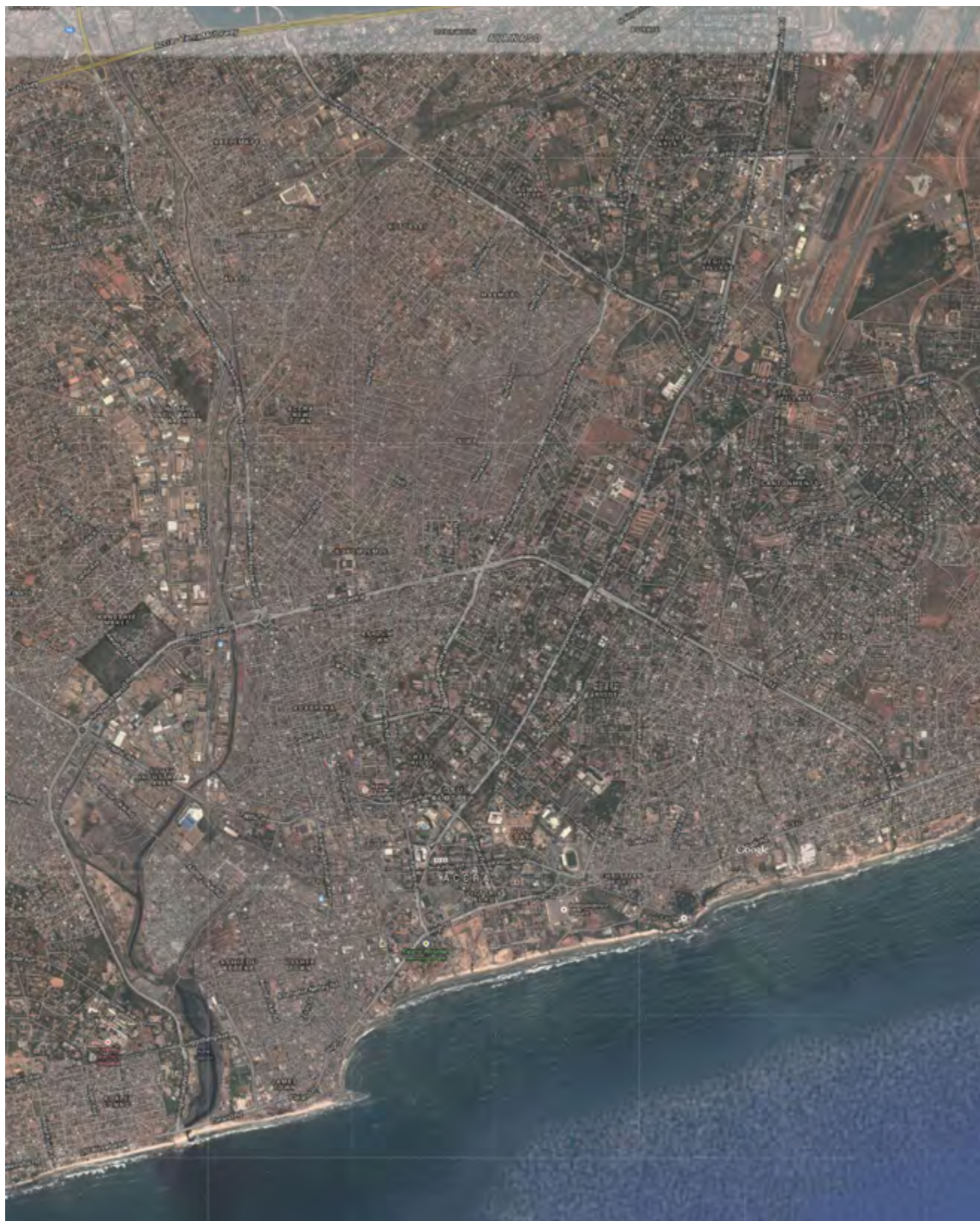
Airport City is an area of 190.000 square meters next to Accra Kotoka Airport, which includes 24 completed commercial buildings and 2 hotels. Four more office buildings are currently undergoing construction. In 2007, there were three commercial buildings. The average rent price is about 37 \$ per square meter<sup>4</sup>, well above the regional average but still on an entirely different league when compared to Lagos' (approx.) 950 \$/sqm (Omidire, 2015).

There are only two streets into Airport City, and both face the heavily-trafficked Airport Bypass Road. Other accesses might have been in the initial plans, but seem to have been subsequently sold to private developers, limiting the access to the area. People are forced to gym-

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4 Grade A, serviced.











khana through the private parking lots to access the area by foot, often carving new paths across the sparse green areas that have been left on its boundaries.

After the recent economic slowdown, some construction works have slowed down their operations, and the once-booming market now seems to be losing ground with decreasing rent prices and potential clients pushing for better deals, thanks to the new balance, which offers higher quality spaces at lesser prices. Average rent prices have fell by about 2/3 \$/sqm between 2014 and 2015, but data shows that grade A developments have shown the least decrease in their value (first-hand data). Market experts such as Anthony Lewis, head of Sub-Saharan Africa capital markets at JLL, argue that the current geo-political instability of some regions and the decrease in commodity prices will mostly expose developers that have built poorly conceived and unsustainable products, and that therefore the real potential for this market lies in the recognition of its long-term value (Lewis, 2016).

Today, Airport City looks like a traditional Central Business District, with its shopping malls, cafes and office buildings. However, getting close, some details begin to stand out. The absence of real public spaces and urban design elements, while, at the same time, street vendors are ubiquitous but never random: they distributed carefully, based on shade, circulation and negotiated hierarchies. The use of unmarked pathways to travel around the district is a constant, with businesspersons hopping over walls and crouching under parking bars to reach their destinations. Buildings that looked bland and aseptic in the architectural renderings of the advertising billboards become warm and organic, thanks to the local construction techniques. Circulation and accesses suffer from the lack of regulations for public space and infrastructure resulting in narrow streets with no sidewalks and little public parking space. Entire portions of public streets have been privatized and closed, limiting access to the area and further exacerbating the already congested traffic. In Airport City, urban planning left much to be desired. By looking at a map of the district, it is clear how portions of land that should have been streets were instead sold to private developers, blocking the access to the district. Circulation within Airport City is precarious, as the only two entrances lie on the same trafficked road. Land rights and transactions also constitute a problem. Accra still lacks a proper land registry, and the jurisdiction on land is split between multiple government entities, a

#### **Previous spread**

Satellite photo of Accra and the three business districts, from south to north: Jamestown/High Street, Ridge and Airport City.

condition that not only undermines the growth of the city but also its citizens' rights (Thurman, 2010). At the same time, return on investment time is much shorter than in Western countries. As local developers explain, here the motto is "build fast, sell fast." These conditions are certainly particular, but just as certainly – not exclusive to Accra or the West African context. Nonetheless, in order to be understood, they require the experience and insight that only those who have been living and working in this environment can provide. After providing some background and visual representation of Airport City's context, the research now leaves the word to these people.

### 3.3 FORMS

















**3.3.1. PLANS**

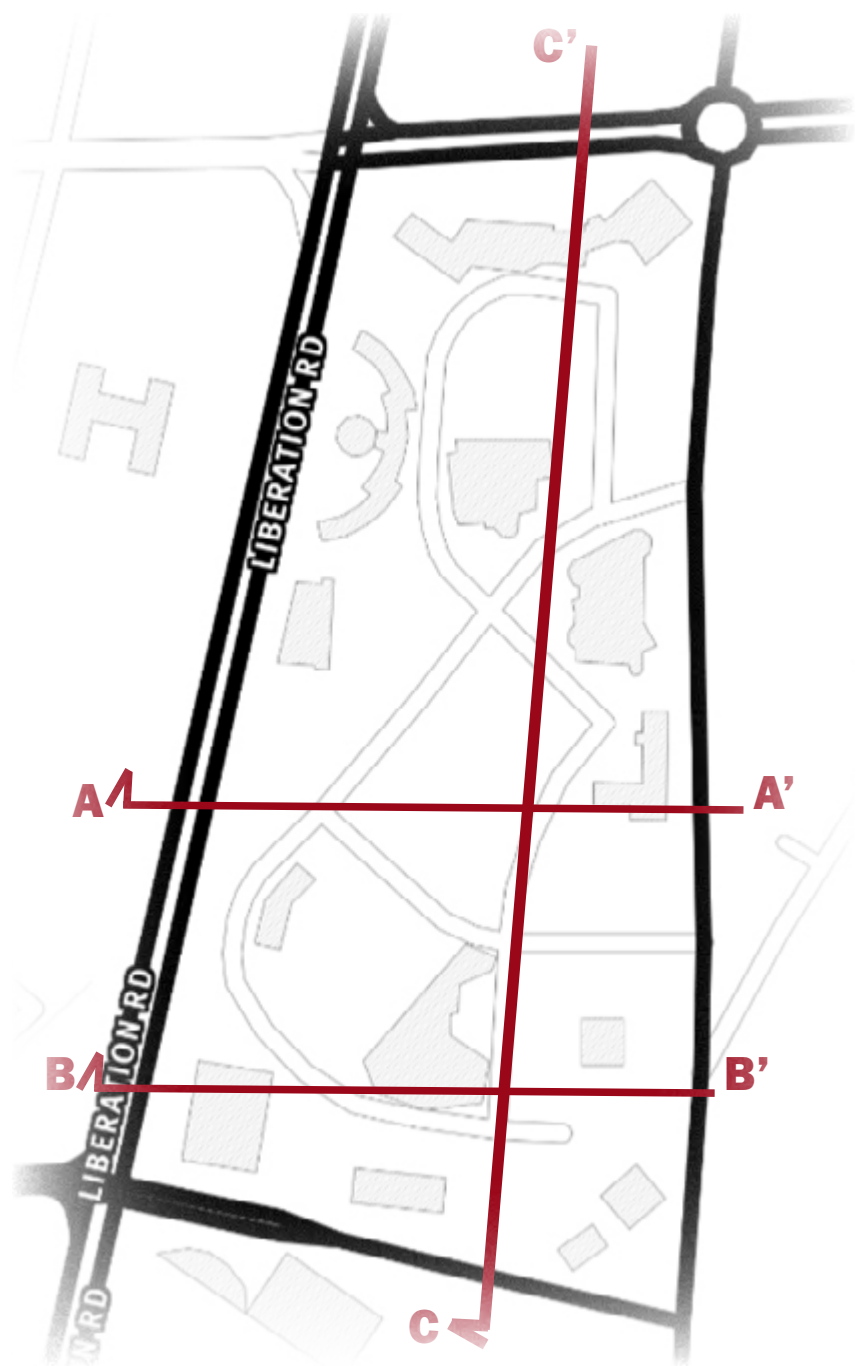


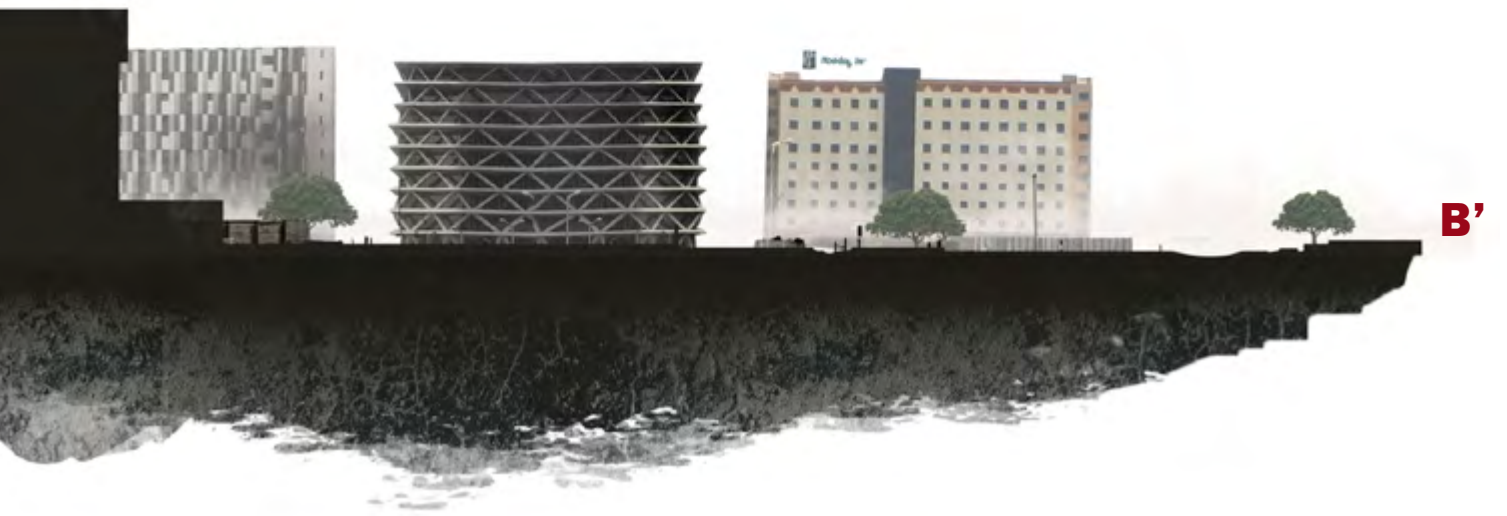
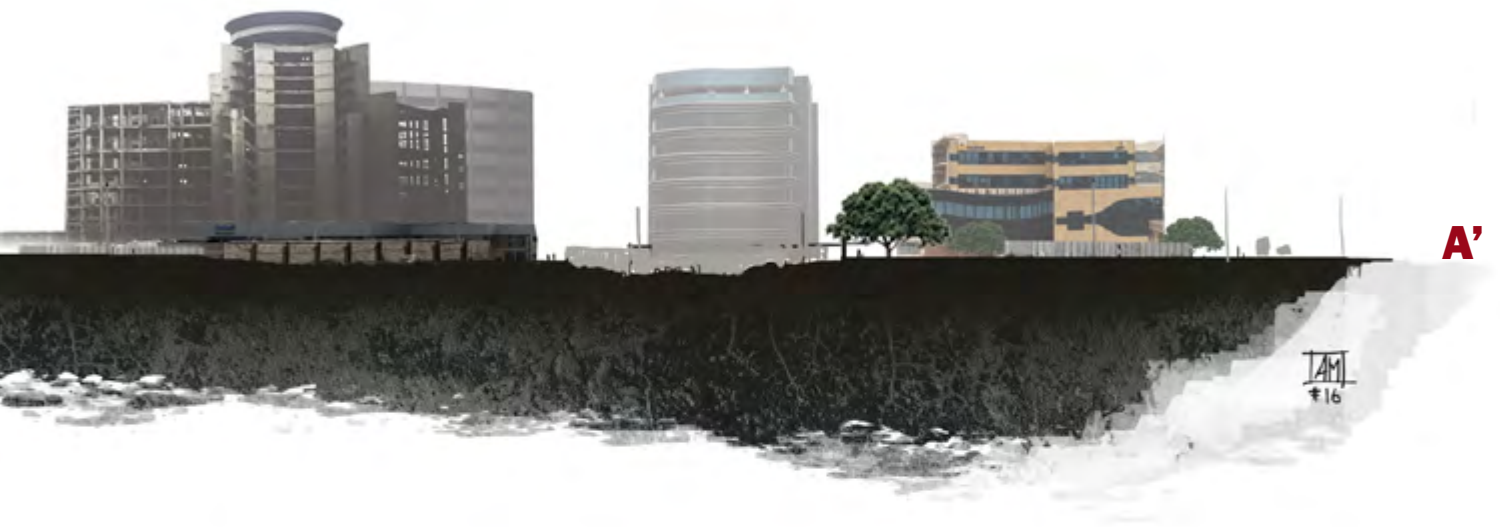




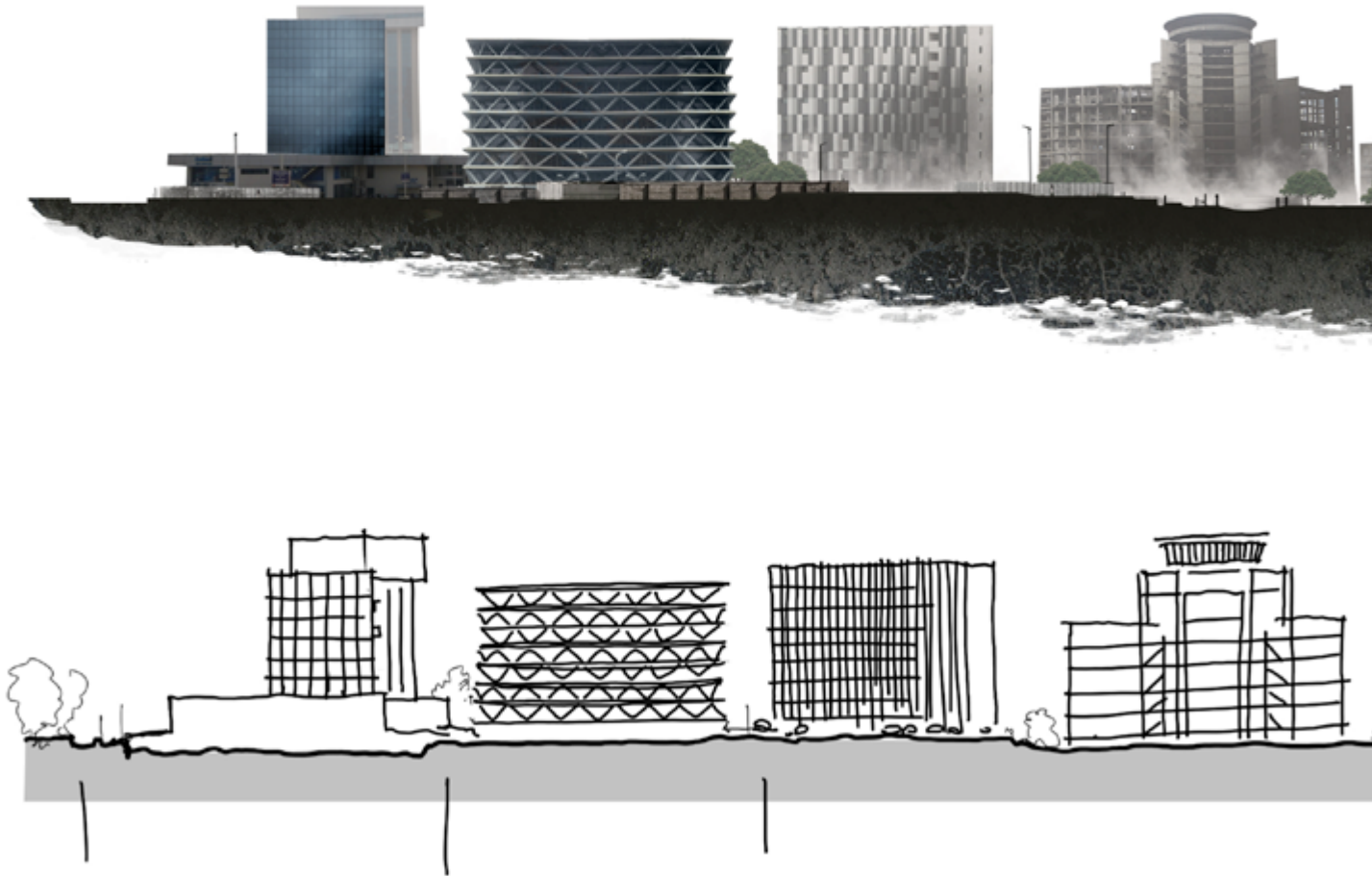


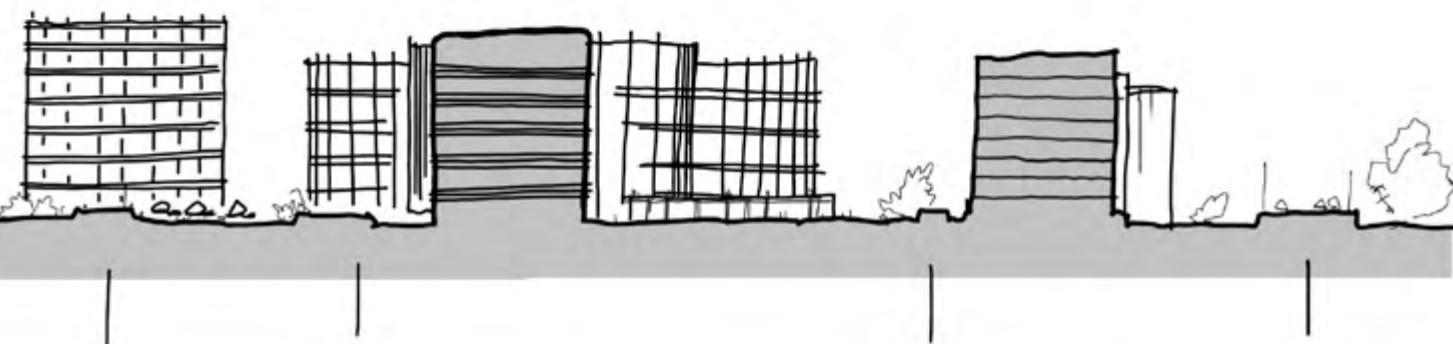
3.3.2. SECTIONS: A-A' + B-B'





### 3.3.2. SECTIONS: C-C'





### 3.3.3. PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY



All photos by the author, unless otherwise noted.





**This spread**  
Street vendors in Airport City.





**Above**

Citizen Kofi Tower, with a rotating restaurant at the top floor, now abandoned.

**Right**

One Airport Square construction site.









**On this spread**  
Public access to Airport City.



**This spread**  
Private access to Airport City.







**On this spread**  
Commercial buildings.







**On this spread**  
Marina shopping mall.







**On this spread**  
Commercial buildings.





**This spread**

Commercial buildings, abandoned construction sites and public infrastructure.









**This spread**

Public street infrastructure elements in  
Airport City.

Source: Laurus DP

## 3.4 PRACTICES

The interviewees were selected based on their activity, their background and not least, their availability to discuss their work in Accra. They include, one former mayor of the city, the founder of one of the most important architecture and cultural networks in the continent, one of the major Real Estate developers, an architect, one of the most experienced construction managers in the city and one investment manager. They are Ghanaian, American, Italian, Nigerian and French. They were all interviewed during the fieldwork, which has required three trips to Ghana between 2013 and 2015, for a total of six months spent on the field, between Ghana and Ivory Coast. Many more were contacted, but for one reason or another, they never became available.

The interviews were conducted according to the basic principles for practice-based research (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ward, 2013) and specifically John Forester's<sup>5</sup> (2006) suggestions for conducting practice-based research:

- 1) Choose actors, not spectators, intimately engaged with a problem that you find crucial, fascinating, and compelling.
- 2) Ask those actors to tell the stories of instructive cases revealing both challenges and opportunities.
- 3) Do not ask the actors, 'What did you think about X?' Ask 'How did you handle X?'
- 4) Get the actor's story with a trajectory.
- 5) Help the actors help us: ask for relevant details, not good intentions; ask for examples, not abstractions.
- 6) Ask for practical implications.
- 7) Allow time for reflections and 'lessons learned'.
- 8) Give 'reflection' content by mining the riches of surprise.

The interviews are integrated with pictures and documents that in some cases were directly provided by the subjects themselves, and other times were gotten ahold of or taken successively, to better illustrate their narratives.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on his experience with the ad hoc research group at Cornell University which, for the previous 15 years had been collecting 'practice stories' from urban and regional planners.

### **ArchiAfrika**

The ArchiAfrika Network is a design-based 'community' based in – and inspired by – Africa. It is composed by architects, artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers and creatives who through their work chronicle the 'African condition.' Together, they are broadening the discourse on Africa's built environment to encompass the role of socio-cultural design inspired development. ArchiAfrika's goal is to promote design strategies developed within the continent, which address the challenges of our future and engage the next generation of professionals in this critical dialogue. [archiafrika.org](http://archiafrika.org)

8. Actis manages funds for 6.5 billion \$, with Africa being its main focus, attracting 41% of its investment. Its Real Estate section operating exclusively in Africa and being allocated 7% of total funds. Main investors include pension funds, Sovereign funds and family offices. Source: [actis.is](http://actis.is)



#### **Nat Nunoo Amarteifioo**

Nat Nunoo Amarteifioo is an architectural historian, writer and the former Mayor of Accra, Ghana. He has worked in the US, Canada and Ghana as an architect and consultant. He lectures on urban management and contemporary Ghanaian art and culture. He is an occasional guest critic for Ghanaian Times and Sunday Mirror in Accra. He is currently writing a book on the history of architecture in Accra.



#### **Joe Osae-Addo**

Joe Osae-Addo is a Ghanaian-born architect and the principal of the architecture practice Constructs LLC, with offices in Accra and Tamale, Ghana, and in Washington DC and Los Angeles in the USA. He trained at the Architectural Association in London, and worked in Finland and the UK before setting up his practice in 1991. His practice synergizes architecture, urban planning, landscaping, and building technology into a single unit geared toward bringing modern architecture and building techniques to create *inno-native* design solutions to contemporary African architecture. He is currently the chairperson of ArchiAfrika (see left box).



#### **Carlo Matta**

Carlo Matta is the former CEO of Laurus Development partners. He graduated from Politecnico di Torino with a degree in Architecture. He has worked in China, Malaysia and Vietnam. Later, he moved into the Real Estate sector. In 2010, Carlo left Europe to open Laurus Development partners, a Real Estate Development company working in partnership with Actis, an investment company that focuses exclusively on emerging markets. Leading projects in both Ghana and Nigeria, Carlo envisioned and executed the development of One Airport Square, a commercial building in Airport City designed by Mario Cucinella.



#### **Alessandro Masoni**

Alessandro Masoni is an Italian architect currently that has lived and worked in Ghana between 2012 and 2016. He obtained his Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Florence, and later moved to Accra to work as a design consultant, where he collaborated with some of the biggest construction firms, but also took on some private projects, for both privates and local NGO's.



#### **Jimmy Castagna**

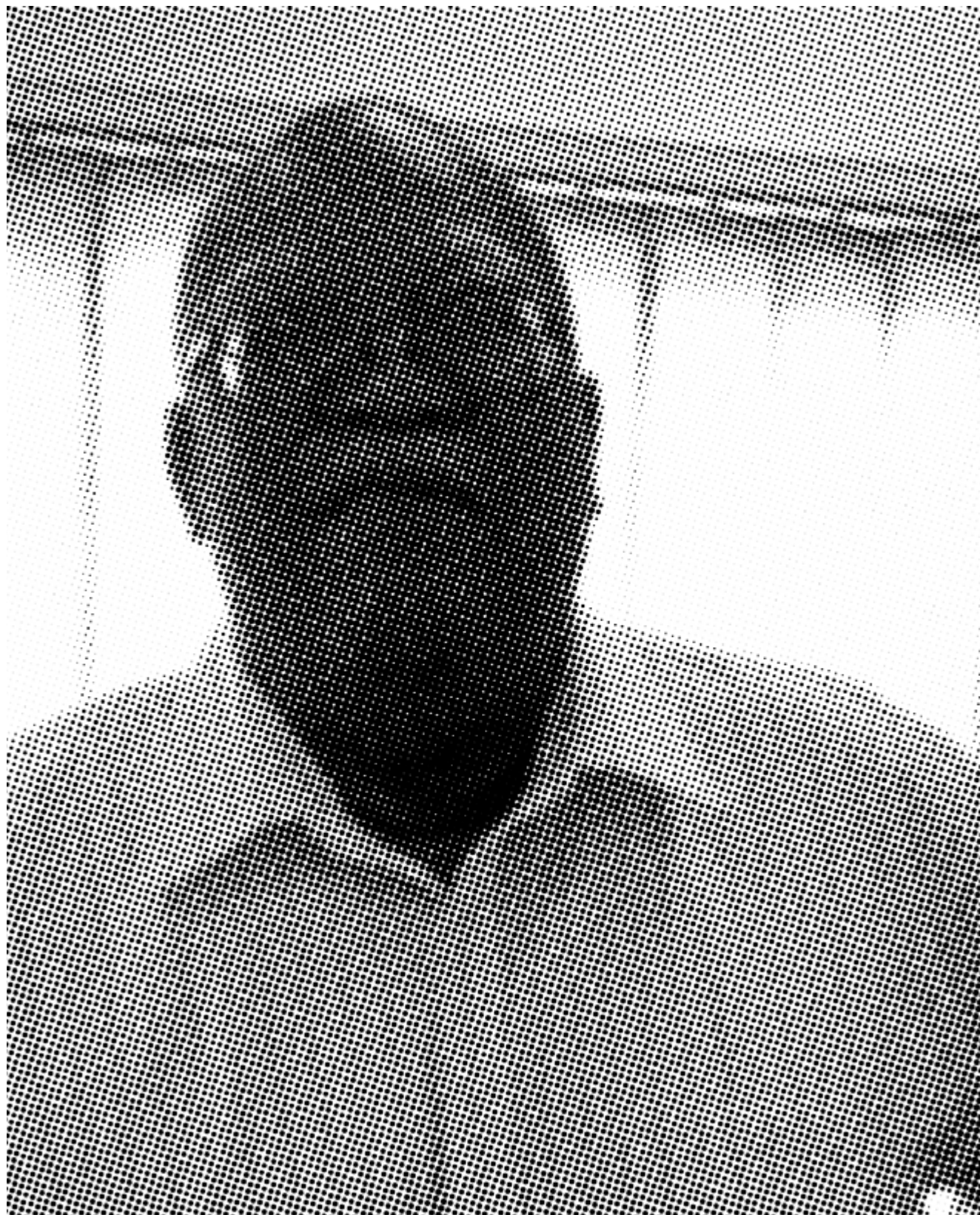
Jimmy Castagna is a Nigerian-born construction manager who has worked in West Africa for the most part of his life. Originally from Biella, in Piedmont, he has studied in Italy and moved back to Nigeria where he has worked until 1984. He has always worked in the construction business, changing companies from time to time, but maintaining a constant in his line of work as a construction manager. "It is the only thing that I am good at" he jokes. He has been the construction manager of One Airport Square, the most technically articulated commercial project in the city, and the first 6 Green Star energy certified building in West Africa.



#### **Ivan Cornet**

Ivan Cornet is the co-founder and managing partner of Latitude Five, an investment and advisory firm operating out of London and Abidjan. He has been in the real estate and infrastructure industry for about twenty years, first as a lawyer, then in investment banking. He has been living in Ivory Coast since 2011.





### 3.4.1. Accra Urban Evolution – Nat Nuno-Amarteifio

In this interview, former mayor and architecture critic Nat Nunoo Amarteifio provides an overview of the urban historical trajectory of Accra, from pre-colonial times to nowadays,

*Is it still possible to recognize any traces of Accra's pre-colonial history in its urban landscape?*

Yes, but one has to go behind the colonial facades, for example in the Jamestown neighborhood. Before colonialism, the slave trade was already present in Ghana, and kidnappings were very frequent in these coastal settlements. To protect themselves, communities adopted maze-like structures, which made it very difficult for any outsider to penetrate inside the compound and find their way out.

*To a foreigner's eyes, city streets look like a never-ending market. What is the relationship between public and private space in Accra?*

Obviously, climate is the main reason why much of the life is lived outdoors. Indoor spaces are used mostly just to sleep and as storage space. A typical Ga household would have a set of huts around a central courtyard, which is the only connection to the exterior. Courtyards are very important because they represent the center of the community, serving not only as social center where the families eat, drink and meet, but also as a place to sleep in the hottest months. It is within the courtyard that life passes. Before independence, when a child was born, his umbilical cord was buried in the central courtyard, establishing an everlasting connection with that space. Major life events are still celebrated there. Nowadays, on the eighth day after a child is born, it is in the courtyard that he receives his name, and is officially introduced to the family. For the first seven days, the child does not receive a proper name but only the weekday's name. This was originally due to the high rates of child mortality within the first week from the birth. This space legitimizes his role within the family. The connection with the ground used to be so intimate that until 1908, the courtyards also served as burial grounds. During ceremonies, libation was poured onto the ground, to awake the ancestors and invite them to participate in the ritual. It was only with the advent of the bubonic

plague that the colonial government put a stop to this tradition. **Until this day, most of the communities in central Accra are still built on the very same grounds, so every proposal to alter the existing structure encounters tremendous resistance since it would essentially alter and disturb the grounds where their ancestors have been buried for the past centuries.**

The home is also a reflection of the Ga family hierarchies. First, the sexes are separated in two different sections. The male is where the fathers live with their adolescent sons. This is also the part of the home that hosts the family gods, therefore no woman during her menstruating period is allowed in this part of the house, since it would violate its sanctity. A gate connects this area to the women's courtyard, where the senior matriarch, her daughters, and the wives of the sons, live. This is where the food is prepared, before being taken into the male section to eat. Males go to sea and to farm, and when they come back home, they hand their money to the women, who actually administrate the family's wealth. **The contact between the street, the public, and the private family courtyard happens through a gate in the female section, which sell the exceeding food on the streets. Hence the road becomes an extension of the private living space.** This also allows the kids to play together in the streets since they always remain under the supervision of the female members of the family.

British colonists actively tried to subvert this type of relationship between the private and the public space, in an attempt to "civilize" the African city. **This resulted in the separation between some westernized areas and other non-regulated and now over-populated zones, where this type of dynamic survived and only occasionally spills out to the outside.**

*What were the results of the contrast of this idea of a versatile, multi-use public space with the rigidity of the western system?*

The colonial vision upon which Accra was built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the peak of ideologies of racial discrimination and the assumption of racial superiority. These ideas eventually gave shape to its actual urban form. Before 1880, the majority of foreigners in Accra were traders, and many of them lived among the African communities in areas like Jamestown in order

to be close to their business. After the British seized the Suez Canal from the French in 1882, a new phase of colonialism began. As Europe became increasingly industrialized, the need for commodities pushed for a stronger presence in the African continent. The British had learnt from India and their other colonies that familiarity between foreigners and locals led to trouble. As the colonial presence became more assertive, the city needed to be adapted to the Western needs, especially for sanitary reasons. Drawing from their experiences, British colons saw segregation as the most efficient way to reduce the causes of disease of their citizens in the continent. Yet, they recognized the need for their quarters to be accessible by the indigenous people. **Therefore, the goal was to structure the city in order to regulate accessibility and interactions within specific time frames: those of working hours, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. This proved not to be particularly practical because of the needs for constant housekeeping and security, two jobs that were typically reserved to the indigenous workforce. The colonial homes themselves ended up embodying the same structure as the city, with separate quarters for the upper classes and the local workforce.** The typical colonial mansion included a residence for nine to ten servants, usually situated in the furthest corner of the garden. All the other workers were segregated in the aforementioned unplanned areas, strategically located to enable them to reach the colonial neighborhoods and at the same time far enough not to represent a threat for their health. The British brought the idea that every man deserves his castle, with his servant quarters at the corner.

The very area where we are having the interview is de facto a no-man's land, a buffer zone where nobody used to be allowed to settle. We are between Barnes<sup>6</sup> Road, bordering the Ridge, a so-called European Reservation Area where Africans were not allowed to live, and Kojo Thompson Road, which used to be called Pagan Road, where the African settlements of Adebraka began. **The purpose of our buffer zone, where the buildings are still relatively sparse and mostly built by the government after Independence, was to leave some space between the African and the European settlements. In this way, the wind would not to carry any insects from**

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6 British engineer who designed one of the earliest versions of Accra's urban plan.



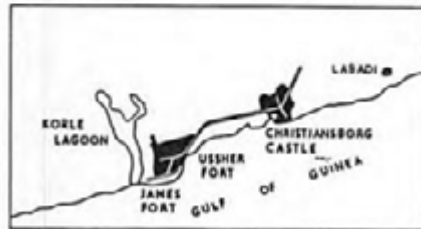
Diagram No. 1

# THE GROWTH OF ACCRA

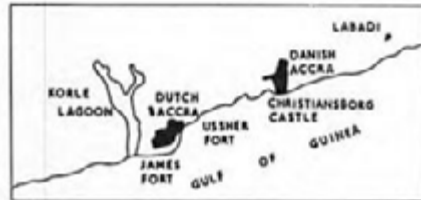
MILE 1 2 3 4 5 MILES



1945



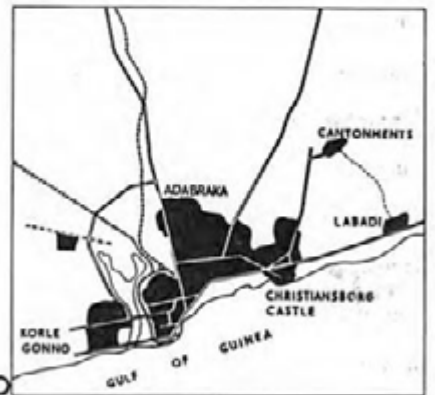
1895



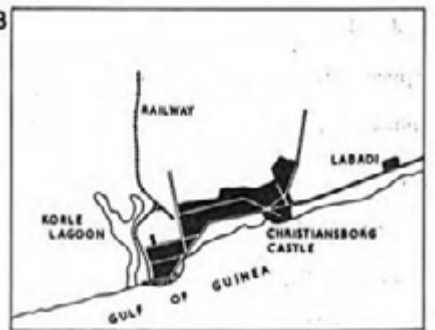
1830



1956



1930



1908

Left

Black Star square, Accra.

Source: Peter Tolkin Architecture

**This page**

Map of Accra's growth.

Source: A.M.A.



**one place to the other.** The Ridge area was specifically located at a higher elevation, while the African neighborhood of Adebraka still stands down-wind and much lower in a basin.

*What have been the effects of independence on the urban composition of Accra?*

Nkrumah was among those African leaders that had a strong Western education and background. His studies and activism in the United States contributed consistently in the elaboration of his Pan-African vision of freedom and independence, and consequently to his refusal to bend to the colonial rule and power. After Independence, **Nkrumah's first instinct was to scrap any signs of colonial influence, and with them, the masterplan drafted by Fry, Trevallion and Flood. The redevelopment of the coastal area of Accra was canceled, and European Reservation Areas were abolished.** Other measures turned out to be harder than expected to enforce, given the framework of the economic infrastructure of the country, which relied heavily on its exports of gold and cocoa and therefore on foreign countries and its former colonists, the British. Initially, the idea was to substitute this demand with infra-African commerce, but without infrastructure and much smaller economic power, this proved unfeasible. Politically and economically, the Western pull was hard to escape. Nat mentions about how many of the Independence-era elites could almost feel closer to the Western mindset than to the African one.

Nkrumah's successors were just as ingenuous, they expected that by overthrowing the enemy of the West, they would receive immediate benefits from their new partners, but they soon discovered that "now you are an independent country, and if you want to play with the big boys, you have to pay." After the coup, the country was in a hiatus, the government was broke, and the country's economy was in very bad shape and adding to this, the fact that none seemed intentioned to lend them any money. A series of military regimes followed, who ruled with their fists, rather than their brains, and whom the Western countries tried to keep at a distance. The intelligentsia had left, most of them went to live abroad, in the U.K. or the United States, and for almost twenty years, the country remained stuck in a state of corruption and mismanagement.

Everything changed with Rawlings, which of course had many enemies, but still remains the person thanks to whom Ghana was finally able to let go of its past, and embrace its new identity. What made Rawlings so effective were the well-educated men and women that he brought with himself and who came in with new ideas for the country's future [Nat became mayor of Accra during the second term of the Rawlings government in 1994 ndr.]. Ironically, most of these young men and women were left wing intellectuals like Kwe-si Botchwey, Minister of Finance from 1982 to 1995, which upon their appointment as key figures in this new government, quickly realized the difference between rhetoric and action, and this is their major credit. Despite their political differences, they realized that in order to enable the development of the country, they should come to terms with entities like the IMF and the World Bank<sup>7</sup>.

*What are the positive things and the downsides about the present situation in Ghana?*

The best thing about today is the freedom of expression. Since my birth in 1942, going through all the steps that have led to this; from Nkrumah gradual turn towards repression, to the later military regimes, I see the current freedom of the press and the possibility to express one self's opinion as the most important achievement of these times. **I remember how it was dangerous to talk about politics before, even within one's family, and how when he became mayor in 1994 there was only one radio station in Accra, the government's station. Today there are more than twenty, and among them, every single opinion is expressed. I believe that you need this plurality of opinions to move the country forward.**

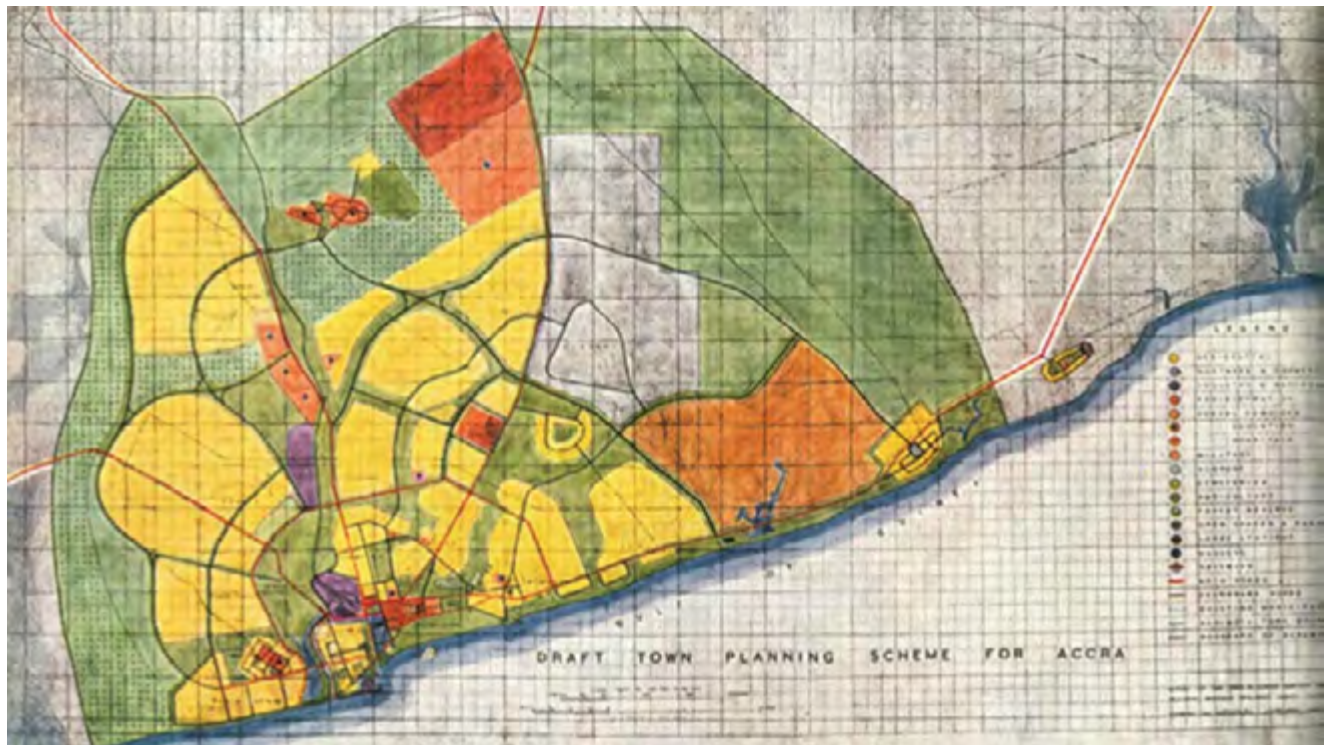
*What do you see in Accra's future?*

**I see it becoming an integral part of a regional network of urban centers, like Lagos, Abidjan, Monrovia, Dakar. The role of the government will also be different, since it will be hard for them to compete with the multitude of powers, actors and**

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<sup>7</sup> In the early 1980's, the government decided to open up the economy and negotiated the first Structural Adjustment Program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1983. By that time, the government implemented a wide range of liberalization policies that set the foundation for the country's next stage of democracy and openness to the global market (Grant, 2009).

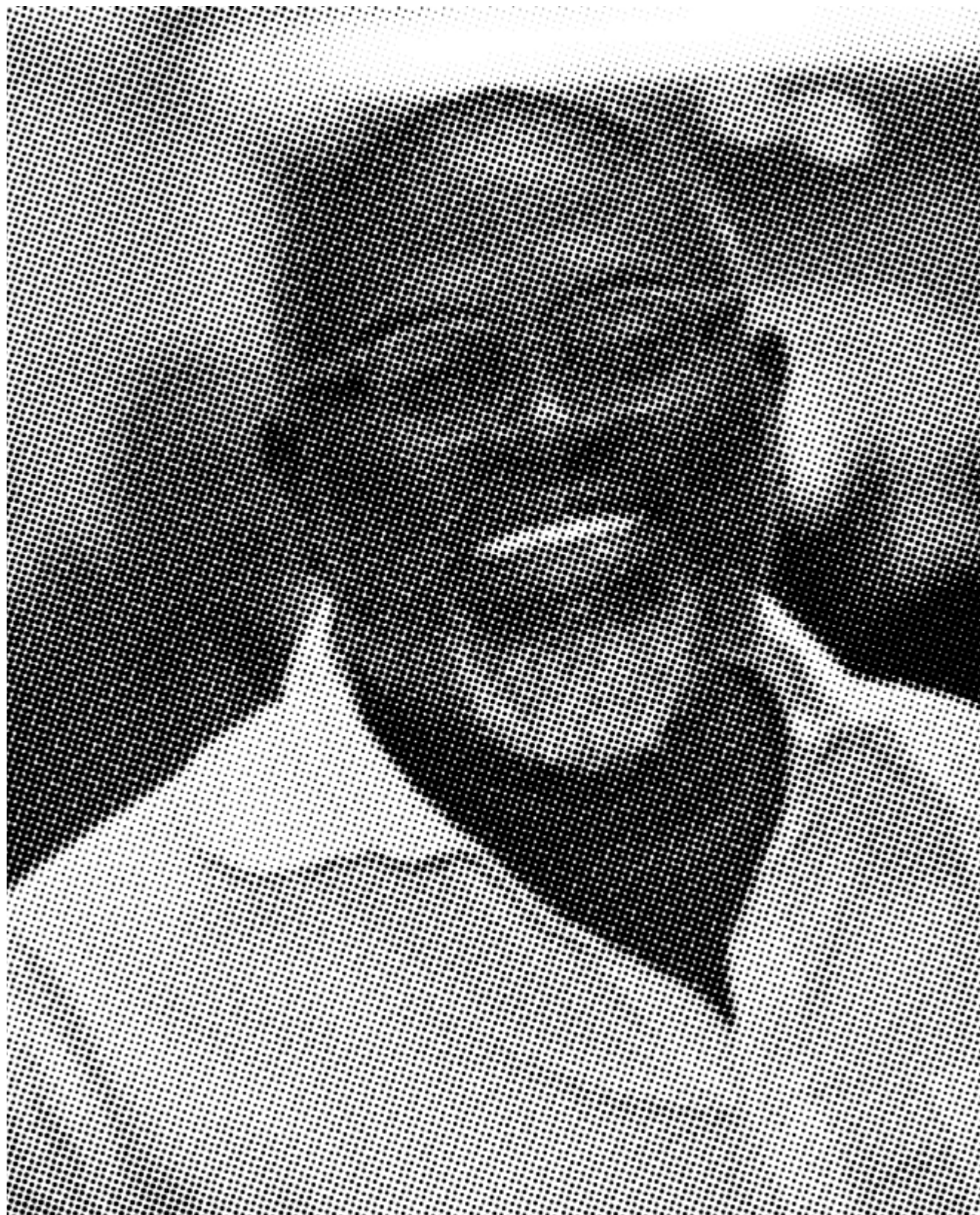
layers that interact within these urban centers. Private businesses will increasingly contribute to both urban and regional development. For example, activating synergies to plan and execute the construction of a regional corridor to improve inter-regional trading.



**Above**

Masterplan by Maxwell Fry, 1948. It outlines the informal, non-planned areas in purple and the buffer zones where constructions was forbidden, in green.

Source: A.M.A.



### 3.4.2. An Inno-Native Approach – Joe Osae-Addo

Joe Osae-Addo illustrates the characteristics of local architecture and urban development, providing insights about the contributions of colonial elements and the hidden potential that lies in the challenges that face contemporary Ghana.

*In your opinion, what is the state of architecture in Accra today?*

In contemporary Accra, most of what is built is not architecture. Architecture does not need to be an edifice or necessarily the product of an architect. It can be just an open space, as long as it is the product of ingenuity and intelligence, that it has a purpose and that it engages its surroundings and the people around it in a positive way. It is a feeling, not a rationale. It is about creating “a sense of place.” I remember feeling it in Accra in the past, wandering through areas like Ridge and Cantonments, with their streets covered with trees and the bungalows. **On the other hand, today most of the residential buildings that you see in Accra - and in a broader sense in most emerging cities - are “aspirational,” in the sense that they do not belong to a particular local or regional style; they mix traits from different cultures and areas without seriously engaging with the local culture or aesthetic. Most of the times, there is simply no time to do that.** Many of these buildings are designed by people that have a very shallow knowledge of the place where they will be built, for developers that do not recognize the value of it. There is a Mediterranean influence, an Italian influence and so on, but there is no Accra. They are buildings that are inspired by the worst that the west has to offer.

*Does this apply to any type of building?*

Nowadays, it is hard to find commercial buildings that express any particular local characteristic or influence independently from them being in Europe, United States or Africa. That being said, across West Africa’s major cities, it is common to find better or worse variations of the same curtain wall buildings and glass towers. They are ubiquitous, from Luanda, Angola to Abuja and Lagos in Nigeria, to Abidjan in Cote d’Ivoire and Addis Ababa in



Ethiopia. **West-inspired office buildings dominate the landscape; they are copied but not adapted in any way to the local conditions. They are not African buildings, they are buildings on the African continent, and to be honest I am glad that they are not African buildings.**

*What the traits of the local architecture style?*

When we discuss traditional architecture in Ghana, the Colonial period should be included in the discourse. **The architecture of the bungalows is the key element of the Colonial period, and it is important to take notice that its characteristics were developed across different continents and countries from India to Africa. Yet, the principles are the same. It is very contextualized architecture in terms of its response to the climatic conditions in that it encourages outdoor experience.** Single-loaded buildings that were elevated from the ground, in which there are no corridors to allow for cross-ventilation, and with covered porches, that are really the key to enable this type of indoor-outdoor interaction. **Nowadays, some elements of traditional Colonial architecture have become aestheticized and represent a style, a status symbol. Their purpose is lost, or at least it has changed: it was born out of the need to survive harsh climatic conditions and developed to be aesthetically pleasing, while today it is built for aesthetic reasons and has lost any kind of significance in terms of its climatic performance.** These elements were designed to provide a seamless transition from inside to outside, providing a ventilated space to sit outside and receive guests, while shading the house and keeping mosquitoes away from the home. Today they are “negative spaces,” which do not take the sun’s orientation into account and that, as a consequence, remain empty for most of the time.

Accra used to host many great examples of this Colonial Tropical Architecture, although many have been torn down, especially in the Ridge and Cantonments areas. Even if we do not take into account their great historical value, these buildings still offer a lot to learn from for contemporary architects. **The climate and the clients did not change much after all, and the client’s needs are always the**

same. Plus today, energy costs are increasing, both in the economic and the environmental sense, and have become a relevant and pressing issue for emerging countries.

*What about new developments like those in Airport City. Do you see any of these issues being tackled by these projects?*

When it comes to new large-scale developments, the first issue is the speed at which they are built in these countries. They just sprout here and there from one day to the other. The other issue is that plans and regulations are chronically lagging behind the market and the construction activities. They should integrate “a bit of the old.” For example, markets. **My proposal is to integrate rather than forbid these activities in areas like Airport City. There is economic value in that, and if the government does not realize it, but I am confident that private developers will.**

*What about local architects, what do you think is their role within this particular landscape?*

Well, first of all, **I think that being an African architect today is much different than being a Western architect. It is imperative for an African architect to take on the responsibility that derives, on one hand, from a deep knowledge of the local context and, on the other, from the potential that lies beneath the surface in terms of innovation. I call this an “inno-native approach” where the architect is a developer of ideas that should engage the myriad of issues that characterize the contemporary African city, from health care to education.** Architects should move beyond the building and develop strategies to tackle polarizing issues, like that of local materials. On one hand, every educated architect agrees upon the fact that it would be better for virtually everyone to source local and sustainable materials, on the other, no African client wealthy enough to pay for the services of an architect will want his home to be built with mud bricks. **This is both a cultural and a design challenge. Steering the taste of the elite towards an increasingly sustainable architecture is fully within the possibilities of contemporary architects. It is a challenge that is rarely taken up by architects and that at the same time cannot work without an illuminated government and middle class, that somehow recognizes the additional val-**





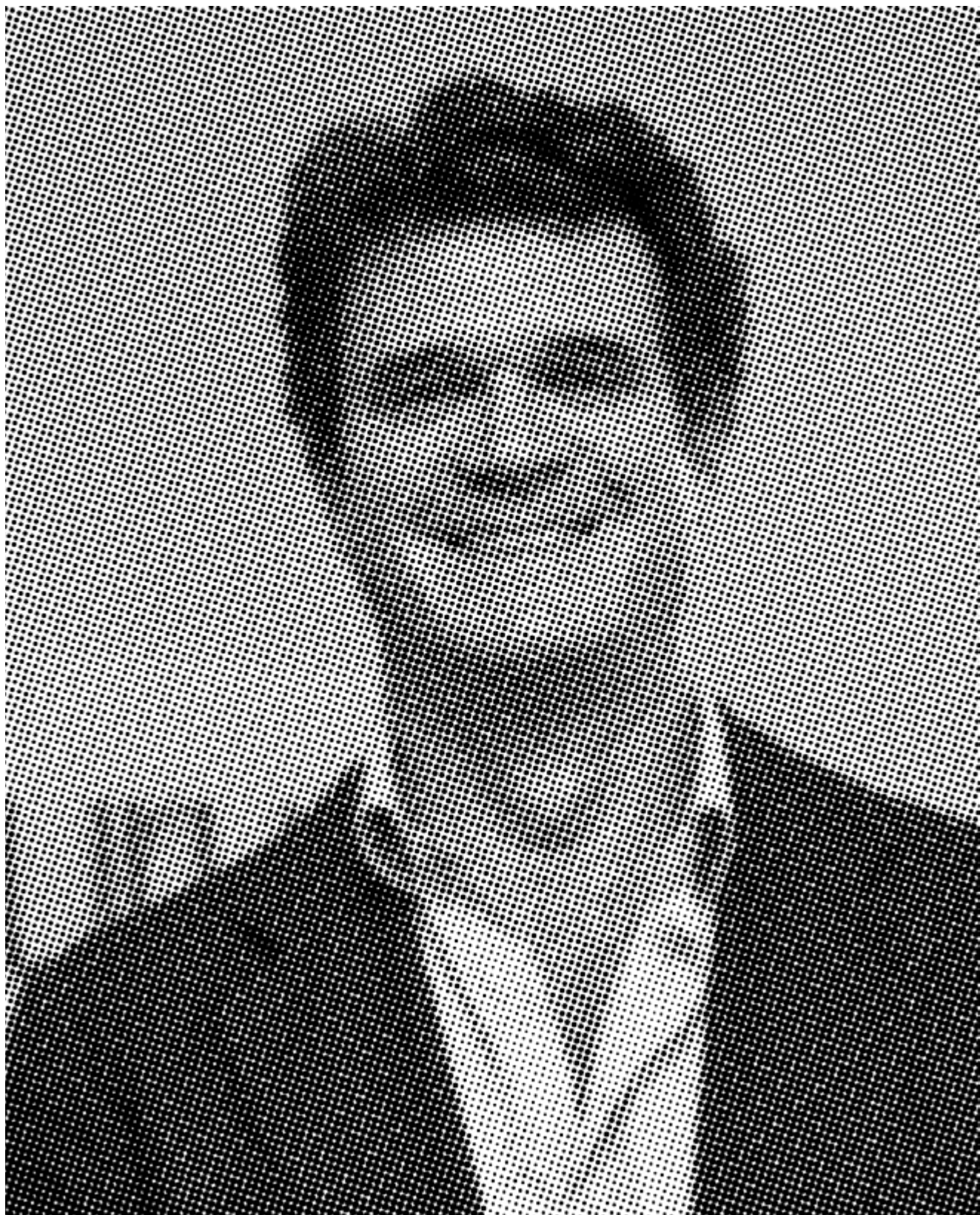
**On this spread and next page**  
Residence in Accra by Joe Addo.  
Source: dwell.com

**ue that this type of architectural products represent.** We must go beyond the model of the village school. Of course, sustainable and functional village schools are very important, but the aesthetic must change in order to make local materials appealing for the local clients. The architecture should be an expression of their individuality, and not simply an imitation of foreign icons. I am confident that the time for architecture to assume its driving role in the construction and development of a local identity will come soon, just as it has happened in visual arts, literature, music, cinema and fashion.









### 3.4.3. Sustainable Real Estate – Carlo Matta

Carlo Matta recounts the behind-the-scenes of the development of the first energy-certified commercial building in West Africa: One Airport Square. He tells of the difficulties in coordinating different specialists operating between Europe and Africa and the drive to challenge the pre-conceptions about what can be done in Africa today.

*What is the story behind One Airport Square (OAS)? How did it occur to you to build such a complicated and ambitious project in Ghana?*

The peculiarity of OAS is that it was the first Laurus project, and its development went hand in hand with the beginning of our enterprise. It all started in September 2009, and by December of that year, we had opened a call for a sort of “beauty contest” between five architecture firms to select two of them, which we would have successively put to work on our first projects. At the time, we did not even know which projects they would be. We ended up shortlisting Mario Cucinella Architetti and Capita Simons, and eventually decided to go with MCA. **I wanted our first project to be somehow iconic and knowing them personally, I was convinced that their style and attention to building sustainability could have worked well in this type of situation. By the time that I moved to Ghana, in the spring of 2010, I knew that they would have been our architects.**

*How did you find and acquired the land?*

**We had been looking around for a suitable plot since September, until a family friend introduced us to the owner of some land in Airport City. In April 2010 I visited the location for the first time and found it fitting for our purposes. It was central, it offered good visibility, and was well connected in the up and coming Airport City Central Business District.**

Having decided to give it a go, we started the negotiations with the landowner. Instead of directly buying the land, we initiated a joint venture agreement, which is the common practice for our investor, Actis. In order to define the proportion of the different participations in the JV, we evaluated the value of the land

based on our own estimates of the market and through comparisons with similar parcels. The negotiations closed with a 97-7% agreement between Actis and the landowner.

Having found a plot, we got in touch with Actis and initiated the first phase of concept design with MCA. This consisted in an Architectural Feasibility Study, where some initial stylistic concepts are drafted together with a general quantification of the massing dimensions and costs of the building.

A binding Head of Terms was redacted, approved by the investment committee and presented to the client. It contained the main terms and conditions of the agreement with the owner, and was binding, which means that it included penalties in case of recess. These penalties are commonly used to prevent the risk of the landowner backing from the deal and getting involved with other investors after having acquired all the intelligence from their current partner. They can still back down from the agreement, but in that case, they must pay consistent fines. Actis on the other hand is not required to pay any penalties, since it has already sustained all the expenses for the feasibility studies.

**When we acquired the land, we also signed a contract with the Ghana Airport Authority that included the clause that construction works needed to begin within two years of the sale, otherwise the land would be taken back. This measure is aimed at fighting the recurring practice of land speculation, where land is bought, kept unbuilt and then sold again a few years after.**

*What was your goal with this project? How did it reflect on the design?*

Our goal was to design a unique office building with retail space on the ground floor. The first concepts and drafts were used to attract and catalyze the interest of Actis' investors.

By September 2010, a 20-pages dossier was put together with this information, and started circulating within Actis undergoing its first "screening" process during which an internal team sets to test and challenge the proposal, trying to evaluate its feasibility. This first test was passed, and a small due-diligence budget was then allocated to both Laurus and a team within Actis to expand the depth of the project in order for it to be reviewed by the Investment

Committee. The Investment Committee evaluated this pre-concept and analyzed more thoroughly the updated cost evaluation together with a market analysis assessing not only the stock<sup>8</sup>, pipeline<sup>9</sup> and estimate demand for that specific type of building, but also the general situation of the country, its political and economic situation, projected economic growth and so on... It also assessed its execution and the composition of the local team, management and consultants that the company was planning to get involved in the project.

*Who were the contractors involved in the project? How did you select them?*

Once the Head of Terms was approved, the project was officially given the green light, and architects and engineers started the design phase. By the end of the year, we started the selection for the contractors in the sectors of mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and environmental engineering and after selecting British company BDSP, in January we had the first Design Kick-off Meeting.

In January 2011, we held the design kick-off meeting, where all the different consultants traveled to Accra to survey the site, familiarize with the market and meet their local counterparts. **A big difference between developing in Ghana or in Europe for us was that local laws required our architects and engineers to select a local partner for each discipline. We offered to provide some assistance by helping them with the selection process by short-listing a few candidates for each of them. These local counterparts are required by law to sign the projects before they are finalized and ideally should provide foreign consultants with local expertise and insight about how to operate in Accra. Our own environmental corporate responsibilities promoted knowledge transfer as one of our main mandates. In reality though, this interaction turned out to be much more problematic than what we had originally expected. Local experts were not accustomed to the high technological level required by the foreign architects and engineers and this gave place to a series of misunderstandings, which we had to defuse one by one. As a company, we took on this mediatory role, which required a lot of effort on our part**

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8 The number of square meters in that sector that already exist.

9 The amount of square meters in that sector that are under construction.



**This page**

One Airt Square  
Source: Laurus DP

**Opposite**

Airport City Masterplan.  
Source: Laurus DP



## 219



**and definitely taught us a lesson. In our following projects, we streamlined the process minimizing the risk for similar episodes to happen again by selecting our local counterparts more carefully, and establishing some very clear ground rules about the dynamics of the relationships between the partners beforehand.** This has worked quite well in our following projects in Nigeria for example.

*How did the budgeting influence the project? Were you able to keep all the costs under control?*

The Concept Design phase started, during which, each consultant produced the Concept Design Report, a document that was approved by Laurus after it underwent a project costing review by Actis' quantity surveyors, former Davis Langdon, now AECOM. At this stage, the costing was slightly over budget, yet we decided to green light the project anyway, starting the next phase of Schematic Design. By the end of it, we were heavily over budget, so we stopped the project and called for everyone to come to the table and re-assess the situation. It took an extenuating value engineering session in London to remedy these budget issues. One of the biggest spending factors was the underground parking, which ended up being reduced to a single floor. At that point, our construction budget was 41 million \$. By the end of that meeting, we were still slightly over budget but we felt comfortable enough to go on with the design.

As the Design Development moved forward, informal dialogues had begun with local construction firms Consar, Micheletti and Barbisotti. They were asked to give an initial estimate of the construction costs based on the Schematic Design. Micheletti set his initial evaluation at 39 million \$, which, when compared to the 45 m \$ of the quantity surveyors, gave us enough confidence to proceed with the project.

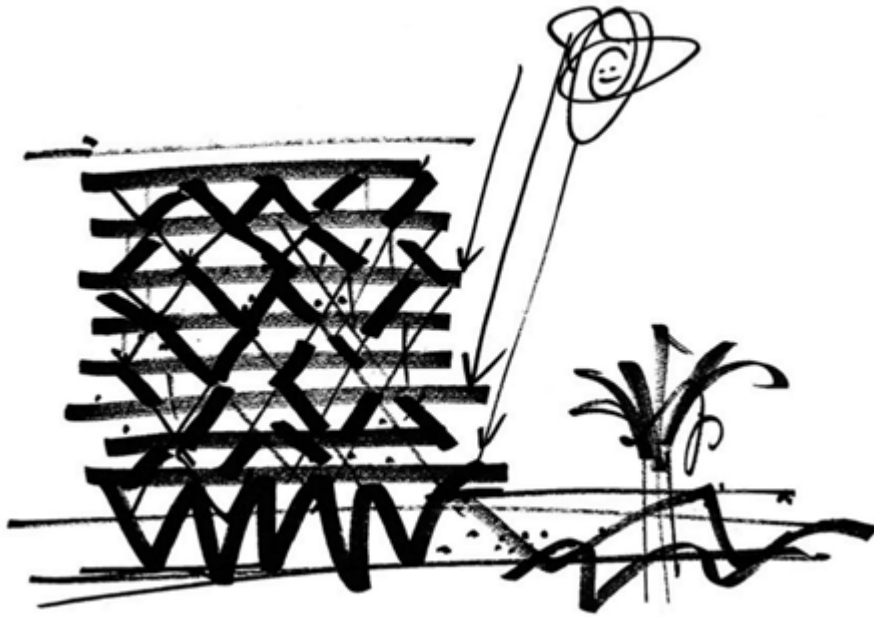
According to our schedule, we had to break ground by August 2011, due to the aforementioned law against land speculation, so to speed things up, we decided to split the construction contract into two parts: enabling works and retaining walls first and the rest of the construction later. We awarded the first part to Micheletti for about 3 million \$, which covered the initial construction setup of

the site with the necessary groundwork and allowed us to comply with the land regulations. Another lesson that we learned is that this operation had the downside of “killing” the competition between local contractors, as it conveyed the image that we had already made our choice, while for the second – and largest – part of the deal we were still totally in play. In Accra, local contractors are a relatively small community, where word spreads quickly. Our feeling was that after this initial commission, the other contractors somehow gave up and did not put much effort in the competition for the following contract. One of them opted-out from the tender, and the other sent us a proposal that was over budget by 20 million, so we decided to stick with Micheletti. **Their tender was also over budget, but we understood that this depended by two factors: first, they simply tend to shoot high when the design passes from concept to schematic and second, that the architect used a European bill of quantities, which did not take into account the costs and availability of specific materials and elements in Ghana.**

By January 2012, we called for a second Value Engineering session in London with all the contractors to try and slim down the budget once again. During that session, we effectively shaved off 21 million from the costs and the project was back on track. Half of them were rate negotiations with the contractors; the other half was represented by reducing the costs of every single element with the help of Micheletti by identifying more feasible and locally available alternatives. There was still a 20% of provisional sums, like the atrium’s canopy, which were items that had not been completely defined by the design and to whom we assigned a value based on the advice of our local advisors. We signed the second contract with Micheletti in the spring of 2012, and by the summer, works were well underway. Around that time, there were some problems with our local construction manager and we switched to Mace, a British company with good experience in emerging markets.

*What about the financial structure of the investment?*

At that point, negotiations were undergoing between Actis and Stanbic about the loan for the investment, which was signed by the end of the year. The total investment was 62 million \$, 31 of which are equity, the other 50% debt. The goal is to find a balance



**This spread**

One Airport Square sketches, section, rendering and picture.

Source: Laurus DP



between the interest rates on the debt and the returns on equity. Usually the goal is to have a 25% return on equity, while nowadays debt costs around 9%. 50% worked well for us since it granted good returns on the equity and allowed Actis to reduce the risk by helping them diversifying their investments. We also applied for tax exemption, specifically VAT and Import Duties, according to a Ghanaian law that classifies selected projects above 20 million \$ as strategic for economic development and subsidizes them accordingly. This turned out to be an extenuating bureaucratic process, and we had to hire one person just to carry the papers around between all the different offices. Also, operating in countries with very volatile currencies means that financially all the transactions must take place in dollars, which is a pretty straightforward practice in emerging markets.

*How did you proceed for the leasing of the project?*

By the end of Schematic Design in 2011, we had set up a marketing suite in our offices here in Accra and allocated a budget for P.R. We assembled a leasing team, hiring some personnel in-house for the local clients and South African ProAfrica (a member of Cushman and Wakefield Alliance) to cater for international clients. In this case, some external factors also played a role. **The political uncertainty that followed the death of the previous president, John Atta Mills, stalled the country's economy and definitely represented a factor in our business.** Around that time, we identified a transition of demand from larger to smaller spaces, and consequently decided to intervene on the design by partitioning the first floor, in order to allow us to be present in the market for smaller tenants. We have also recently signed the deal with the property managers, JHI, which will manage the building's leasing and maintenance during the years during which Actis will own the building, and will take care that everything is working when the building is sold. Actis' funds are closed, which means that they have a 10-year expiration date. Usually the strategy is to sell the building in the short term, which means one or two years after its completion. Since all the leases have an annual increase, which goes from 3 to 5% per year, the Net Operating Income (Rent Roll minus all the operating costs) increases as time

passes. Since when the building is sold the buyer usually applies a Capitalization Rate<sup>10</sup> to the Net Operating Income, and our cap rate target is around 9%, it is better to wait a few years before selling, in order to increase its value.

*What about the construction process, did you encounter any particular difficulties in that field?*

**Well, the first problem that we had was that when we were about to begin with the construction of the structure, Politecnica and Micheletti still had not defined a commonly agreed technical solution for the project façade, the diagrid. It was an extremely complex problem, as every joint between the beams was unique and had to be imported from Italy and cast on-site. There was very little room for error. In any case, they went on to build some mockups directly on-site and somewhat learned “in the process.”** The first problem that we met was a dis-alignment of the structural grid, due to some imprecisions during the topographic measurements of the site; nonetheless, the error was manageable without having to rebuild the entire basement. This delayed us for about two weeks and forced us to conduct another survey of the structure. **Following this, we had to ask for the engineering company, Politecnica, to send here an engineer, to personally supervise the casting of each beam. Another issue came up with another local company that was in charge of the construction of all the aluminum doors and windows, which had to be completely re-done because of some imprecisions in their construction and execution of their finishing treatment.** This was another symptom of the difficulties of coordination between local and foreign firms, even if like in this case, the local firm is actually managed by some Italians (Royal Aluminum, which is a sister company of Micheletti, under the umbrella of Trasacco). Despite all of these issues, we were able to finish the structure a month in advance on our schedule.

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<sup>10</sup> Capitalization rate (or “Cap Rate”) is a real estate valuation measure used to compare different real estate investments. It is calculated as the ratio between the net operating income produced by an asset and the original capital cost (the price paid to buy the asset) or alternatively its current market value.



*You mentioned the difficulties of the interaction between local and foreign companies. What do you think are the main problems? How could they be solved?*

The first example that comes to my mind is about architecture. **Western Architecture firms do not realize that in emerging countries there is a much smaller variety of materials and technical possibilities than in Europe. The first step that a foreign architect should take before designing something in an emerging country like Ghana is to conduct a survey about what is actually available in the country in terms of materials and technologies.** It might sound banal, but it is something that is very hard to find in the current architecture landscape.

*The project in question was also particularly complex at that. In the end, do you think that it was worth the risk?*

Certainly, we do have our fair share of responsibility and we have learned a lot from this experience. We dared venturing into unknown territories, asking a lot from our partners, but we also took the risk on our shoulders. In our other projects in Nigeria, for example we went for a much more straightforward design whose execution went way smoother. With One Airport Square, we were trying to do something different and acquire visibility, which I dare say we succeeded in doing. Different buildings suit different purposes.

*What about the decision of acquiring energy certification, how did it work?*

Well, it made things a little more complex but it was definitely worth it, making **One Airport Square the first energy certified building in Ghana was definitely a big achievement for us. When we decided that we would have sought to acquire Green Star rating for the building we knew that we would have had to make some compromises.** In terms of business efficiency for example, we usually consider anything below 80% (rentable surface over total surface) unprofitable, and this time we settled for around 85%. It was a compromise that we were willing to make. Natural lighting and ventilation were also a determining factor on

**Right page**  
One Airport Square.  
Source: Laurus DP

the final design, with the internal atrium providing both, but at the same time also increasing the costs of the façade since the surface is much greater.





### 3.4.4. An Italian Architect in Ghana – Alessandro Masoni

Alessandro Masoni talks about the practice of architecture in Ghana from his Western perspective. From local contractors, to clients to the availability of skills and technologies, Ghana requires flexibility and experience.

*How did you start practicing as an architect in Accra?*

When I first got to Accra I did not plan to stay. Actually, I almost did not have a plan to come in the first place! When I first arrived, I started working for the Barbisotti & Sons construction company. One of the many construction companies of Italian origins<sup>11</sup> in Accra.

The first project that I was involved with was the somehow controversial Labadi Beach Tower, an 80 million U.S. dollars concrete building overlooking the popular tourist and leisure spot of Labadi Beach. Initially, I came as design manager, substituting another architect who had just left. My first task was to reorganize - and in many cases redraw completely - the drawings and design documents about the project, that needed to be adapted to the site conditions and in some cases lacked the necessary detail and coherence. In addition to this, I recognized some great discrepancies between the architecture design and its execution. An experience that would recur many other times during my work in Accra. I had the feeling that the project had been originally designed for a completely different site. It would not have been the first time but I am not sure if that was really the case here. In any case, it did not seem particularly fit for its seaside location: only two out of four apartments could enjoy the view over the sea, with the other two looking at the Labadi slums instead. **As it happens in many cases, the architecture design had been done externally, without any particular knowledge of the local technologies, materials and skills, and the construction company was trying to execute it at its best –**

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<sup>11</sup> Until 2007, the construction market was dominated by companies managed by Italians or of Italian origins, like Barbisotti, Consar, DeSimone, Micheletti and Trasacco. Since then the market has been flooded with Lebanese and Chinese companies, but Italian companies still maintain a relevant position in the market thanks to their local roots and established expertise. Barbisotti has been active in the country since the 1920's.



using their long experience in the Ghanaian construction environment. By the end of 2013, the client ran out of funds and the project eventually came to a halt.

When the Labadi project stopped, I decided to explore the possibilities of establishing a local consultancy firm together with a Ghanaian architect that was my colleague at the Labadi project. **The market seemed promising although always fluctuating, even in those years of economic boom. I remember the uncertainty that surrounded the economy when I first arrived. It was due to the confirmation of the electoral results but, once the results came in, all the activities resumed promptly. This gave me a hint of a system working quite differently from the countrywide inertia that characterized the Italian market from which I came, with both its advantages and disadvantages.**

From that moment on, I have worked on a wide variety of projects, but none as big or ambitious as the Labadi beach tower. After that “introductory” period to the architect’s profession in Africa, I have also always tried to find a balance between my commercial work and some research work through pro-bono activities. In the past few years, I have designed a number of residential villas, apartment buildings and offices. At the same time, I have been designing and conducting research through my work with some Italian and local NGOs, the more interesting of which concerns the construction of a research center at the Mole National Park in the north of the country.

In the Mole project, I took on all the architecture design, but also analyzed the availability and characteristics of local materials and technologies. Its construction was carried in its entirety by local workers, which at the beginning, were relatively unskilled, yet willing to learn. **The greatest challenge about this job for me was to learn how to mediate between designing the ideal technical solutions to the issues at hand, while at the same time assessing the actual possibilities for them to be implemented locally.** Despite having spent plenty of time on the site, I was always based in Accra, which meant that many times these problems had to be solved at a distance, which did not contribute to make things any easier (Accra and Mole park are 800 Km away from one another and the trip takes one full day of travel).



Yet in the end, we were able to manage it, the completion of this project is in sight and this experience is giving me great satisfaction. Thinking about it, I find it interesting to see how many of the initial frustrations about the project have now become its real heart and soul. **At the beginning, this project did not seem to offer any possibilities for expression, design-wise. Yet, it is thanks to the many limits in terms of construction materials, technologies and skills that it has found its direction and, at the end of the process, the final result will surely have a clear identity and purpose. Every choice and decision was rooted in a specific reason and all its limits have stripped the design bare of any unnecessary.**

*You mention the limits for construction materials, technologies and skills. What did affect your design the most? What presented the biggest challenge?*

**Well, locally, there is a very limited array of skills that are available. It is very hard to find a carpenter that is actually a carpenter. There is a lot of improvisation going on, and that can cause many problems as you can imagine. I expected a certain scarcity in terms of local materials and technologies, but having to design and draw something, knowing that it has to be the simplest and clearest drawing and structure possible, and that it will be built without any of the instruments that one would normally use made it the biggest challenge.**

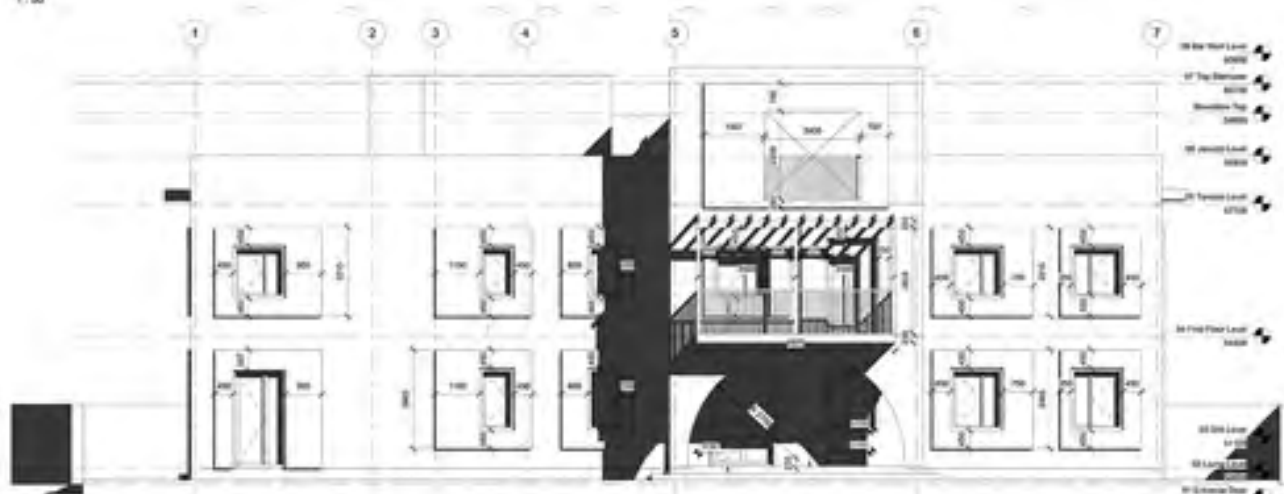
*Who have you been working for in the past three years? Were your clients mostly locals or foreigners? What was your relationship with them?*

Since I began to work as an architect in Accra, all my clients have been local. One thing that I have been noticing about them is that Ghanaian clients allow very little time for design, and that in this initial – and in my opinion crucial phase - can become very impatient, very quickly. After this phase, once you deliver your first drawings, the process often stalls and time can be lost in all sorts of ways. What I found interesting is that this does not seem to bother them at all and usually does not represent much of a problem. **I have learned from this, and I am now aware that the design process can continue easily after the first delivery as much more flexibility is allowed to the design further down the line**





Elevation North  
1:50



Elevation South  
1:50



**This spread**  
 Private villa, under construction and  
 interior.  
 Source: Alessandro Masoni

when compared to Western countries. Many modifications that would be unlawful in Italy are allowed, or sometimes tolerated here, this way I am able to dedicate more time to the design phase while the overall process is already underway.

*How do you relate to the local taste? Did you find any particular discrepancies between here and the West in terms of demands from the clients?*

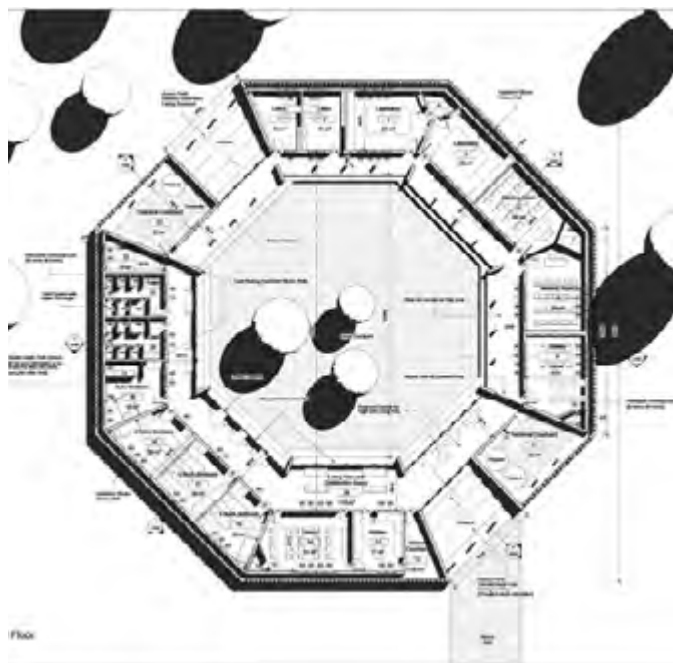
In the commercial market, clients ask for their project to stand out from an aesthetic point of view. That is the number one priority. On the other hand, there does not seem to be any interest about specific technical solutions, energy consumption or sustainability. Clients are looking to sell their project as soon as possible, and since these concepts are not considered and/or understood by their buyers, they are not willing to invest extra money in them. The only requirement other than the building's aesthetic is that it should stand up. Being Accra an earthquake-prone region, I have definitely seen more than a few instances where even this requirement seems to have been taken quite lightly.

Another thing that surprised me at first was that clients appeared to be almost more impressed by my approach to the work, my professional attitude, rather than its result in terms of architecture. Maybe it is the result of them being less sensible towards architecture than to the relationship with the architect. And yet, this tells something about an approach to architecture that seems to be missing in Accra, the attention to the schedule and the detail. **Local aesthetic remains enigmatic for a foreign architect on the one hand even if, on the other hand, the suggestions that African culture gives in terms of aesthetic research and composition techniques is incredibly fascinating. It is hard to explain this split between the deep African popular culture and the taste of the higher classes.** Porches and columns recur, in a sort of imitation of traditional British or North American architecture. The approach towards design for these clients is very simple, almost like assembling pre-set modules. The important thing is to have, let's say, three bedrooms, a living room, the "family area," a residue of the traditional housing compounds, a kitchen, a garage and two bathrooms. It doesn't really

matter how they are arranged as long as they are there. There is probably going to be a veranda with a porch, and some columns at the entrance. That is the typical residential project despite the infinite possibilities that good design research could offer.

**In addition to this, private clients do not seem to understand or in any case care much about the concept of added long-term value to the project. In my experience, they would rather spend on expensive furniture and material finishes than for example on more efficient components or energy saving solutions. That extra-step is still missing.** Even at a more basic level, I cannot count how many times I have been trying to convince a client to opt for a more experienced - and expensive - building contractor without success. In the almost totality of those cases, choosing the cheaper contractors meant that the works had to be re-done three times – which ended up costing as much as the better contractor would have - but with a consistent compromise in terms of final quality, not to mention the loss of time and energy.

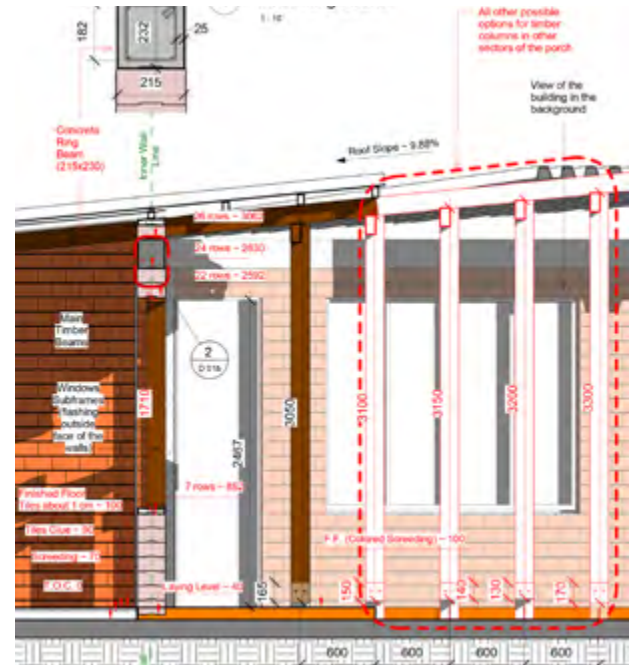
**The same thing applies to the choice of materials, although in this case, another factor gets in the way, that is the status that some of these materials seem to grant. Clients are willing to spend more for products like Italian or Spanish tiles for example, even when they are not of any particularly good quality. Many times they are third or fourth choices, exported from Europe and which present many imperfections. Yet, their origins and the status that they carry with them make their value, and that is something that I have found most clients to be willing to spend for. Other times they are premium quality imported products, which in addition to being very expensive by themselves, require the workers to arrive from abroad in order to mount them and install them properly.** Of course, we are always talking about wealthy clients that would be able to afford these type of luxuries, but only few of them are willing to invest in better quality products. **The interesting thing is that those who do experiment these solutions are always incredibly satisfied with them, and after they see the results, they can really appreciate the difference. In the past couple of years there has been a visible – albeit still quite slow – increase in the demand for these type**



**This spread**

Mole Park. Drawings and work in progress.  
Source: Alessandro Masoni







**of products, which is mostly to be attributed to word of mouth and personal recommendations. It is a slow process but there are some encouraging signals.**

Construction materials do not leave much room for creativity either, as there does not seem to be much of a choice. Prefabricated concrete blocks are the standard and the only choice that one can make about them is about their quality. What is interesting is that Ghana actually exports a lot of wood, and Teak is considered to be almost a pest. It is expensive, though, and much harder to use in terms of the skill level that it requires. It also does not seem to have much of an appeal to contemporary clients that prefer the more modern and solid feel of concrete.

*Is there much demand for the services of an architect? What do you need to be able to offer to get in the market?*

First, you must offer a reasonable fare, but that is not enough. You have to be physically present in the market. Both your work and your person have to be present in the city. If you do not offer this, good chance is that you will be overlooked and another architect or a “draftsman” is going to take your job.

*What is a draftsman?*

A Draftsman is someone who would be supposed only to draft for an architect but instead is the one who often puts projects together through a cut and paste type of process, fitting them to their clients taste and then gets them signed by local architects for a small fee. He is not a registered architect but offers very similar services. Their work is ubiquitous in the market for small-to-medium scale projects and apparently, many clients deem the quality gap with registered architects to be acceptable.

*What about being a foreign architect in Accra? Is that seen as a benefit?*

**Foreign architects do have an edge. There is a lot of potential for development in Accra, but unless you are a star, the physical presence in the city remains fundamental. Once you are here, there is no particular need for public relations, if your work is good, the word spreads and you are set.** Nonetheless, if you leave - even just for one week - you must find a replacement

to supervise your work, otherwise construction sites will simply screw up. Constant supervision over the process is absolutely necessary. This might come natural with bigger commissions, but takes a lot of effort when working at a relatively small scale like I do. The common practice is to use a first layer of plaster over the concrete blocks, then some gypsum, and ultimately apply the paint. And yet, the process is all but straightforward, as the market is pretty conservative, which means that even if in theory there would be quite a wide choice, you usually end up using always the same materials. Even within this restricted range, the materials are not always fit for the purpose. Paint scrapes off the wall after a short period of time because it is not compatible with the underlying gypsum. Garden villas in the up and coming residential neighborhoods like Airport Residential or East Legon cost around 900-1200 \$ per square meters to build (depending on the quality of the finishes), and yet a lot of them look unfinished. I have found it to be very hard for the clients to plan the expenses and the costs of the project. They are rarely willing to invest in a good cost estimate. The result is that in many cases the construction process is protracted for years before it is completed. Mismanagement of the funds can literally be “seen” in the architecture, and not only because of the lack of paint on the facade. Looking at the bare concrete bricks, it is often clear how their quality decreases as the building goes up. They show more imperfections and a worse texture.

*How did you have to adjust the design process to fit it to the reality of Accra?*

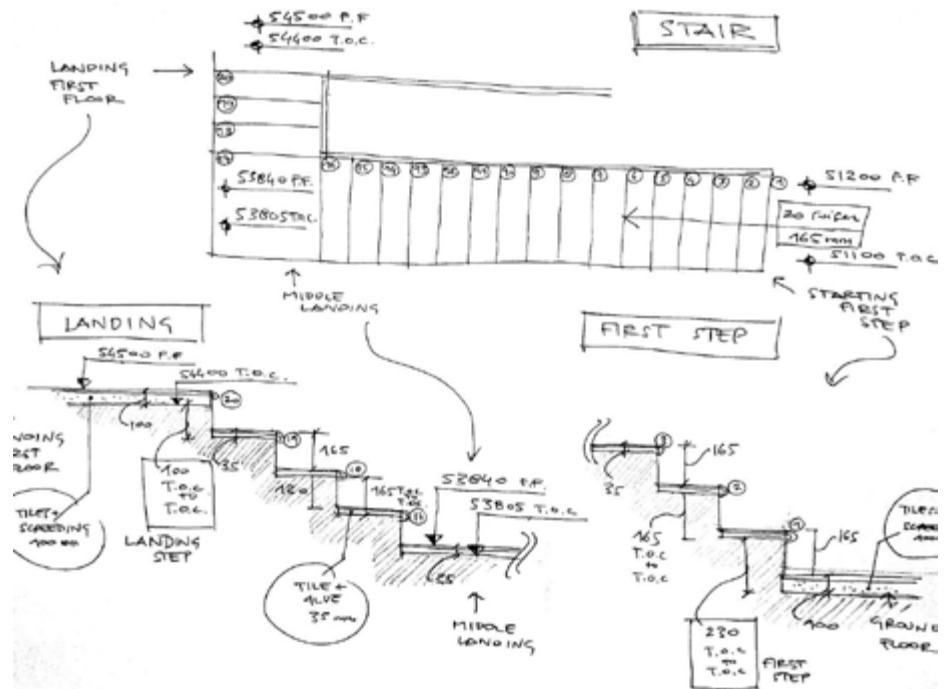
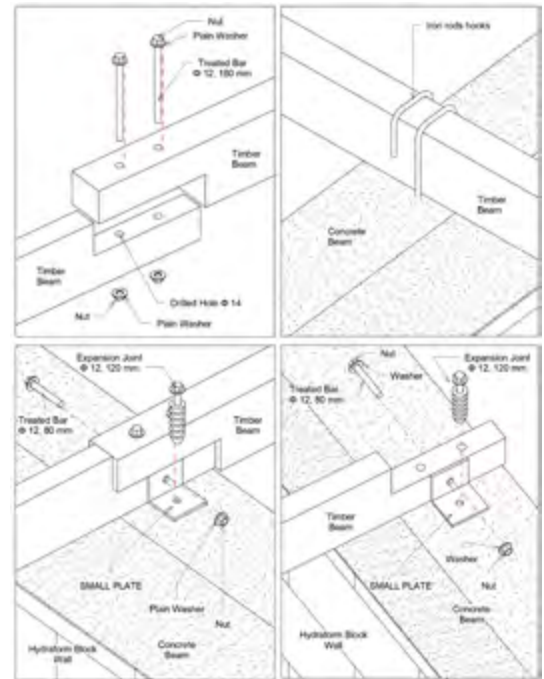
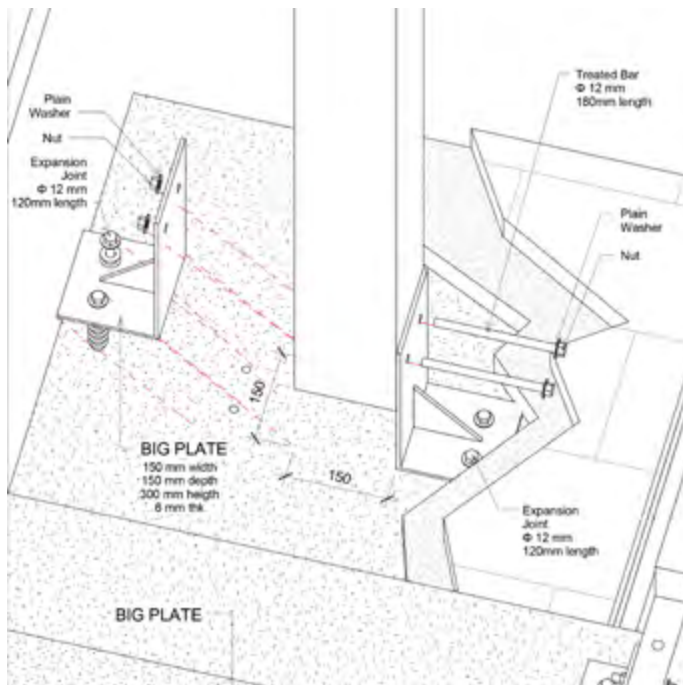
**In Italy, when I worked on a project, I usually had two main constraints: budget and building codes. On the other hand, thanks to the availability of materials, technologies and skill-sets there is a great freedom of expression and choice. In Accra, even if you manage to find the materials and ship them over, it is very hard to find workers that are able to utilize them and this has a great impact on the design. Here, a well built stair is a great achievement.** Curved walls become almost unimaginable without the most constant supervision. I have found this to be both limiting and inspiring. It has taught me the value of getting

something built without taking anything for granted. I was lucky because upon my arrival in Ghana I have started by working almost exclusively in construction sites. This has given me the possibility to understand what is feasible once the time came for me to start designing. It would have been unimaginable to get anything built in Accra without that experience.

**Right page**

Design details.

Source: Alessandro Masoni





### 3.4.5. Building in West Africa – Jimmy Castagna

Jimmy Castagna provides an overview of the construction sector in Ghana. Given his experience he shares a few insights and tips about the profession and the importance of local expertise.

*What does the construction business look like nowadays in Ghana?  
How did it change over the years?*

**Over the past 20 years, there has been a lot of activity, but it has not been constant. Despite all of the infrastructural deficiencies, some of which are still present nowadays, construction business across country has been very active, its main selling point being the country's international openness and stable political situation.** Investors' confidence has increased one election after the other, encouraged by the political climate. Of course, there have been some hiccups along the way, like the court case about the election results in 2012, but the fact that it unfolded peacefully, with all the parts respecting the judge's decision, has made that also a positive sign from the local political class. Along with that, Ghana's strategic location in West Africa has also evidently contributed in positioning it as a key hub in the region. The civil war in Ivory Coast, and Nigeria's security problems, have also factored in. For example, it is not uncommon for many Nigerian families to choose to live in Ghana instead. All the sectors of the local Real Estate market have benefited from this, starting with the residential, commercial, retail, infrastructural hubs like the port of Tema and so on. This has been particularly evident in the past 10 years, in which growth has been exponential.

*What are the peculiarities of your business here in Ghana, what would you define as the main differences between it being practiced here rather than in Europe?*

There are some fundamental differences between Africa and Europe. Here, the idea of insulation is absolutely looked-over. Roof insulation and double-layered glass have made their appearance only in the last 4-5 years and are still seen as something new and have not been very present in the market. Despite their great potential in terms of value and performance, clay bricks or exterior







**On this spread**

Construction works at One Airport Square  
and team meeting on site.

Source: Laurus DP

insulation are not used in Accra, the result is that as soon as the light goes out, the home becomes an oven. There used to be companies that built a furnace about 25 years ago, but they have not been able to get their business off the ground. Partly because of local taste and aesthetics, partly because of the poor infrastructure - namely the electricity supply - which makes it very difficult and costly to establish a production line of any kind in Ghana.

**Also, there is no will to invest in better construction techniques or quality materials in this market, as architects and contractors are constantly asked to spend as little as possible, often sacrificing quality over flashy aesthetics. All the fixtures and materials should be as cheap as possible, therefore reducing the life cycle of the building while increasing dramatically its maintenance costs and this is something that I still find difficult to accept as a builder.**

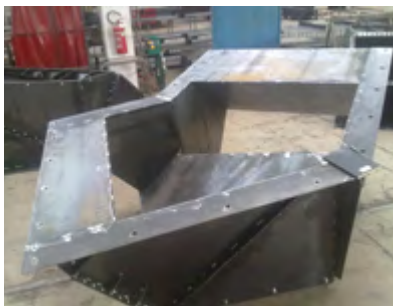
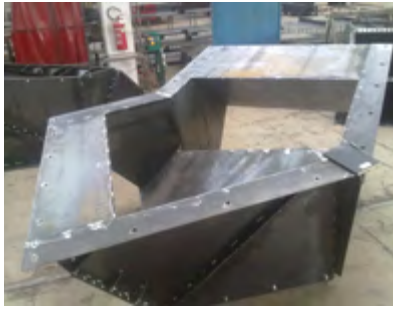
A construction manager, or an architect coming from abroad, should be ready to reset his needs and priorities, if he does not want to be overwhelmed by these differences, which would ultimately make it impossible to work here. **They should be ready to adapt. In all but the most expensive areas, the idea of setting up the infrastructures before starting the construction of any type of building does not apply. Even in the latest business districts like Airport City, there is no water drainage system or sewers. Road networks, electricity lines, water supply are developed in parallel, or even after the construction of the buildings. There is no coordination between them and this ex-post approach certainly does not result in their efficiency under any point of view.** This is the status-quo in Accra, and in many other African cities, and I understand that it can be difficult to accept for someone coming from developed countries.

Historically, Accra has grown mostly horizontally rather than vertically. The first building taller than 10 storeys was built in 1995 and, until the building boom in 2007, the great availability of quality land had made it possible for developers to make a profit even with relatively low density buildings. A few years later, I have built the second tallest building, the MTN tower which is 16 storeys high. Underground parking lots did not exist and buildings did not need to reach particularly challenging heights. Nowadays things

**Right page**

One Airport Square diagrid joint casts.  
Source: Laurus DP





have changed, and construction technologies have been introduced that allow for taller buildings in order to maximize investments in a more competitive market. The practice of “piling”, once unknown, is now well established in the construction business. Even as relatively few buildings now have their own underground parking lot, they are becoming a more widespread, as in the case of One Airport Square, which I have built with Micheletti.

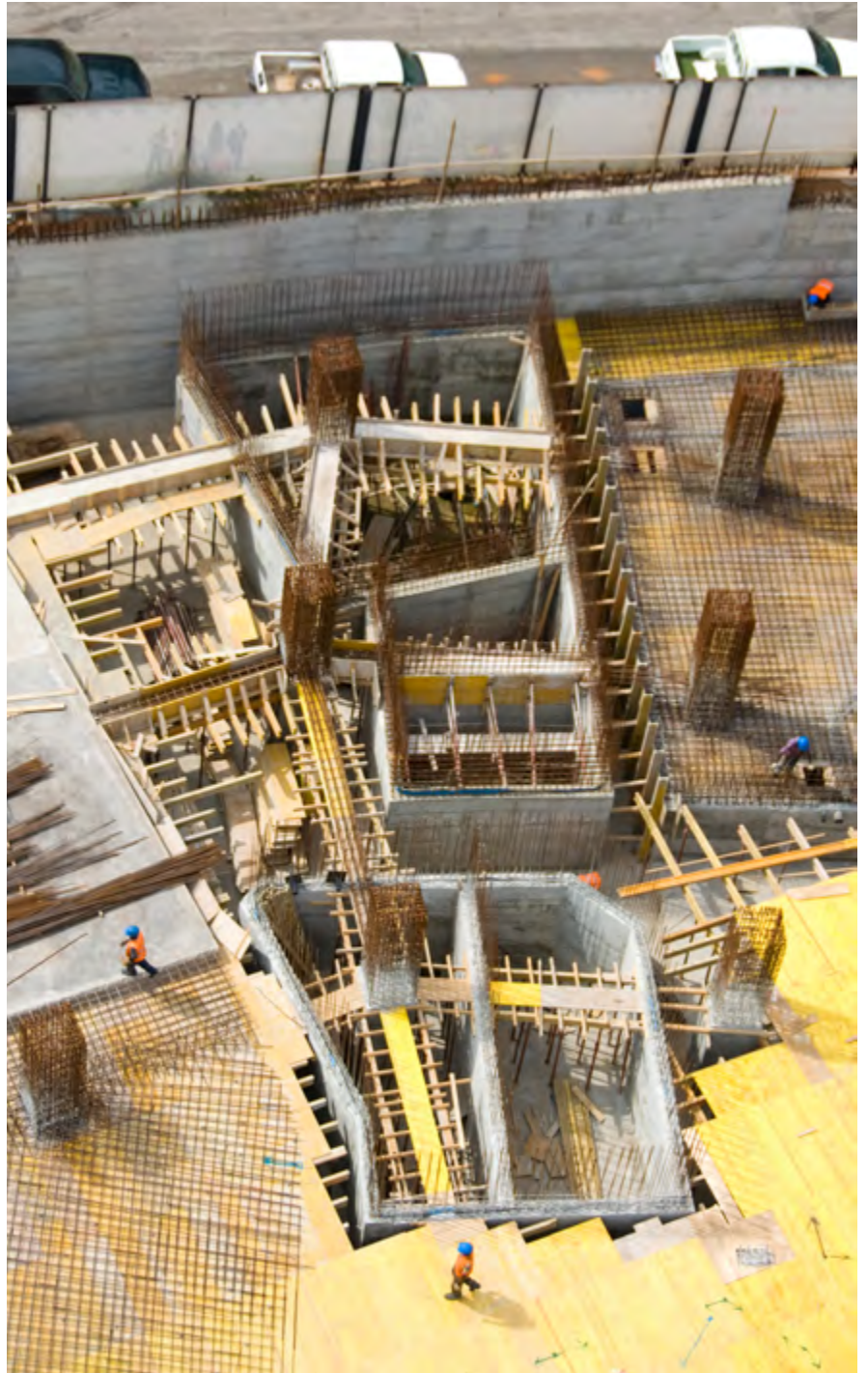
Traditionally, breaking ground consisted in excavating as little as possible to lay the first basement layer, also at an infrastructural level some key components like concrete mixers were missing, therefore making it logistically impossible to build taller buildings. **In 2000, there were just three cranes in Accra and freight elevators did not exist. The limited availability of specific technologies constituted a very real limit to any design and therefore the market. Cooling systems, plumbing, the electric system and wiring, all these technologies were very basic at the time. Nobody would import a product for whom there is no market, and, with some exceptions, as is the case for One Airport Square, many of these issues are still present today. Here, innovation proceeds one building at a time. In addition, the predominantly conservative mindset on the clients side certainly does not help.**

*In Accra, it feels like it is possible to see the different trends and “construction eras” of building by looking at its architecture.*

Indeed, there has been the time of Alucobond, where every building - even residential - was built using an Alucobond facade. Then there has been the era of curtain walls, that of Marseillaise-looking concrete tiles when for four or five years everybody used them.” In terms of structures instead, there has not been much evolution. **Cast concrete remains the only option for architects and builders. Prefabrication does not exist, except for the concrete blocks that compose both exterior and interior non-bearing walls. Pre-mixed concrete is also something that is missing, and that has some worrying implications regarding the logistics of obtaining the sand that is necessary to fabricate the concrete. There are no quarries of any significance around the capital, which represents the bulk of the local demand, so riverbanks and “pits” are utilized instead.**







**On this spread**

Construction works at One Airport Square  
and team meeting on site.

Source: Laurus DP



The “informal” nature of these materials constitutes a significant threat, not only to the environment and the safety of the workers involved in its extraction, but also to the buildings where it will be employed. [The quality of the sand is not certified by any means and, while it could be relatively simple - while still being costly and time consuming - to sample and test the product if the materials belonged to the same extraction point, there can be no certainty of that, since the middle-men could batch together different sands in order to re-sell them at a more convenient price and that process would go completely unnoticed] This is a very big issue, and an issue that is not going to disappear anytime soon, indeed, I believe that it will get worse. High transportation costs, due to the lack of infrastructure and logistic services, drive the costs very high for any material that comes from afar. Now we buy the sand 50 Km away from Accra from the first firm that has industrialized the process of collection of the river sand, but of course, these resources are not infinite and costly, while the demand is very high and there is very little control.

*What about the role of the local workmanship in the construction business, how do you adapt to the lack of skillsets available on-site?*

**Paradoxically maybe, fifteen years ago the average skill set of the workers was very superior to today. I say paradoxically because thirty years ago, in Nigeria, Ghanaians were considered the best artisans. You would hire a Ghanaian with your eyes closed, because they knew their business. Now the same thing is happening in Ghana with Togolese workers.** They are considered more skilled than the locals are. Of course, this is also partly because the market was smaller, so those who worked in the sector had been there for a while and were still there because they were good at their job. In the last ten years instead, the demand for workers has been so high that everyone can improvise and say they are workers.

As a contractor, you cannot afford to perform much selection among the workers because of the much higher demand for their services. Consequently, costs have increased because of the increased supervision that is required. If before a foreman could supervise twenty workers, now you need a foreman every seven-eight of them

and this is of course a big increase. Irregular surfaces, non-vertical walls are common mistakes and if not corrected promptly, could lead to significant costs in the later stages of construction.

*Over the course of his career, you have interacted with a number of architects, both local and foreign. What are the most common misunderstandings that you have experienced and how would you proceed to avoid them in future projects?*

While working on the One Airport Square project, during one of our first meetings, Mario Cucinella showed me a sketch of an idea for the internal bridges. I asked him about the material he was thinking to build them with. His answer was steel, which did not represent a problem. It was costly, but feasible. After a few months they proposed to build them with pre-fab concrete, which, while a perfectly reasonable idea in Italy, it simply could not be realized in Ghana. **The logistic issues were very basic, but real. One over all: the streets are not designed to allow for big construction elements to be transported, their width is not constant, there are wires everywhere and it becomes extremely expensive to think about moving those elements in that way. It simply was not feasible. Therefore, the first advice that I would give to any architect or designer approaching a project in Accra, or really any other African city, is to take some time to get to know the territory beforehand. It will save his clients a lot of time and money.**

To give you an example: if I must cast 1000 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete in Italy, if I want to be scrupulous, I call the supplier with a week of advance and it is usually a pretty straightforward process. If I must cast 1000 m<sup>3</sup> in Ghana, first of all I must identify the specific location, because not only working in Accra or in Tema is quite different, but even different neighborhoods within Accra are a factor. If the job is in Airport City, I will schedule its transport between 2 and 3 PM for traffic reasons, in other areas I would probably choose an earlier or later time, according to the location. **I must know whether that area has electricity or not, and if there is running water available, otherwise I should provide with the necessary generators and tanks. I must know how long it will take for the supplier to provide the materials, and think about how to get it to the**



**On this spread**

Construction works at One Airport Square.

Source: Laurus DP



**construction site.** These type of things can really help optimize the process, and it is all part of the expertise that I provide as a local professional, it is my job to know these things, but it is also the designer's job to acknowledge that these are relevant factors that should be acknowledged. Naturally, even when you weigh in all these factors, problems arise, but that is part of the game. At least in this case you are minimizing the risks.

**When it comes to architecture design, early involvement is the key. The possibility to get the contractors involved early in the design process is fundamental, independently from the design style. Having someone at the table, that can inform you about the availability of specific materials, technologies or skills really helps in avoiding pernicious situations down the stretch. Scale is also a factor, as even the materials that are locally available become hard to supply in large quantities. When unprepared, design choices often become subject to the local availability of specific goods. Deadlines and budgets are not very flexible, so the design and quality are the ones who usually suffer the most. The less you are ready to modify your choices and idea, the more expensive it gets. I would say that as a rule, it is always better to be prepared, but in Africa, no matter what, the keyword is flexibility.**

**Left page**

Construction works at One Airport Square.  
Source: Laurus DP









### 3.4.6. The West African Market – Ivan Cornet

#### Interview: Abidjan: The Francophone Choice with Ivan Cornet

Ivan Cornet explains the reasons that led him to relocate to Ivory Coast and the peculiarities of both Abidjan and the West African Real Estate market at large.

*What brought you to Ivory Coast in the first place?*

I have been in the real estate and infrastructure industry for about twenty years, first as a lawyer, then in investment banking until 2008, when the economic crisis hit the markets. My wife was born and raised in Abidjan, her father being a legal consultant for former president Houphouët-Boigny. Houphouët-Boigny's government has been in charge from 1960 to 1990, with the country experiencing annual growth rate of nearly 10% from 1960 to 1980, the highest of Africa's non-oil exporting countries. In the early 1980's, the country experienced a severe economic crisis due to the overcutting of timber and the collapse of sugar prices, together with the global economic crisis, which led to growing unrest and the resignation of the president a decade later. Three decades of instability followed, accounting for two civil wars, the last of which in 2010-2011. In 2011, noticing some positive signals from the country's political situation and economy, my wife and I decided to move back to Abidjan for six months. Four years later, we are still in Côte d'Ivoire.

*Would you still have chosen Ivory Coast as your next destination if it were not for your personal connections to the country? What did you do upon your arrival?*

No, but probably just because I would not have known much about it. **Information on Sub Saharan Africa is scarce, that is the reason why the first thing that I did upon my arrival, was to begin a round of interviews with local actors to determine the business perspectives and ultimately the feasibility of his idea.** I consult with both international and local investors

and economic operators to help them with their business in the West African region. **Nowadays Ivory Coast's real estate market is still a "green field": with the majority of existing buildings having been built twenty to thirty years ago and having received no maintenance in the interim, the main activities right now are about redeveloping existing assets. New developments exist, but they are still hampered by difficulties in finding and acquiring viable land, a recurring issue in many African cities.**

Nonetheless, Abidjan is different from most African cities, in that since its first conception it was set to become a "big" city. This was carried forward by the first government in collaboration with French companies and resulted in solid infrastructure and a carefully laid-out urban plan, which has been able to withstand the past thirty years of negligence without compromising its efficiency. Today, there are no power cuts or water supply issues in Abidjan. This is also due to the fact that in the seventies and eighties, much of the public infrastructure services have been privatized, which eventually helped them to rank among the most efficient in the region.

[Ivan shows a map of the city, in which he points out the different characteristics of the each neighborhood. There are the Plateau, which is the city's central business district, upscale Cocody and Riviera with their golf courses, embassies and private villas and residential and lively Marcori in the middle of the lagoon.]

Since many companies are still relatively small, they prefer to rent and refurbish former villas in residential neighborhoods rather than search for office space in the crowded business district of the Plateau, which also presents some infrastructural deficiencies. For example there are just a handful of technicians in the city that are able to repair the elevators in the business district's many towers, and people are often forced to walk flights and flights of stairs to reach their offices. The buildings are being refurbished but these shortcomings will take a little longer to be overcome. On the other hand, there have been a handful of successful new developments like the *Green Résidence et Buro*, which have started to bridge this gap, combining residential and commercial spaces and who have managed to solve most of these issues. Moreover, this specific development is situated in the heart of the Cocody

residential area where the people working in the offices are most likely to live, which has been a very smart move. These luxuries are reflected in its price: serviced office space is on the market at around 17.000 CFA per square meter (around 27 \$)<sup>12</sup>, a very high price for Abidjan, where rates are usually between 11.000 and 13.000 CFA (17 to 20 \$).

When I first arrived, in 2012, prices were around 8.000 - 9.000 CFA (12-14 \$) per square meter. Nonetheless, as the company grows, I continuously keep an eye on rent prices and different possibilities across the city, but there seem to be few options for mid-sized firms like Latitude Five, which despite the ongoing expansion still doesn't require enough space to be in the market of these premium developments and remains stuck in the middle of commercial-fitted residential buildings.

[Ivan shows a map with the recently finished Third Bridge by the French company Bouyugues, which connects the neighborhoods of Riviera and Marcory]

The lack of a direct connection between the airport and the upper-residential areas had been the driver of the boom of the Marcory district. **During the past decades of instability, it was frequent for the two other bridges to be blocked and easily controlled by just a handful of armed forces, therefore making it impossible for anyone from these areas to reach the airport. Many foreigners during those years preferred the ease of access of Marcory, which gradually turned into the residential and nightlife center that it is today.**

*What are the up-and-coming areas in Abidjan?*

The airport area has recently been at the center of some speculation involving a huge new development project called *Aerocité* (Abidjan's Airport City), but that seems to have been stuck amidst some negotiations among all the different public and private actors, and is currently on hold. **The appeal of this particular area, whose state-owned land currently consists mostly of wetlands, is that it would allow for major developments in a city where**

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<sup>12</sup> At Q1 2017 Exchange rate 1 CFA (XOF) = 0,0016 \$ (USD). (CFA was 0,002 \$ in Jan 2013, which means: 17.000 CFA=34 \$; 11.000 CFA=22 \$; 13.000 CFA=26 \$; 8.000 CFA= 16 \$ and 9.000 CFA= 18 \$.











**while it is difficult but possible to find 3-5.000 square meters plots, it is almost impossible to find any bigger ones, especially in the order of 10-15.000 square meters.** In addition to this, such developments usually benefit from the clustering typical of Central Business Districts, where many different enterprises are grouped and built around one specific area, and the virtual carte-blanche that this completely empty area next to the airport represents, remains very appealing for potential investors. **The decision of the African Development Bank to move back its headquarters to the city in 2014, after 10 years' relocation to Tunis, is certainly an encouraging signal for Abidjan to retake its crown as financial "capital" of francophone West Africa.** Due to the political instability of Cote d'Ivoire, that position had been taken by Dakar for the past 20 years, but nowadays it cannot compete with a secure Abidjan when it comes to location in the region. Furthermore, I personally find the absence of consistent quantities of oil and gas to be an encouraging factor for the country's development. Lacking great commodities, the government is forced to invest in other sectors, which will presumably bring greater benefits to the lower classes of the population, and consequently stimulate the much auspicated middle-class growth.

#### **Previous spread**

Left: Treichville Centre, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Source: Flickr @Osset

Right: Abidjan, Plateau.

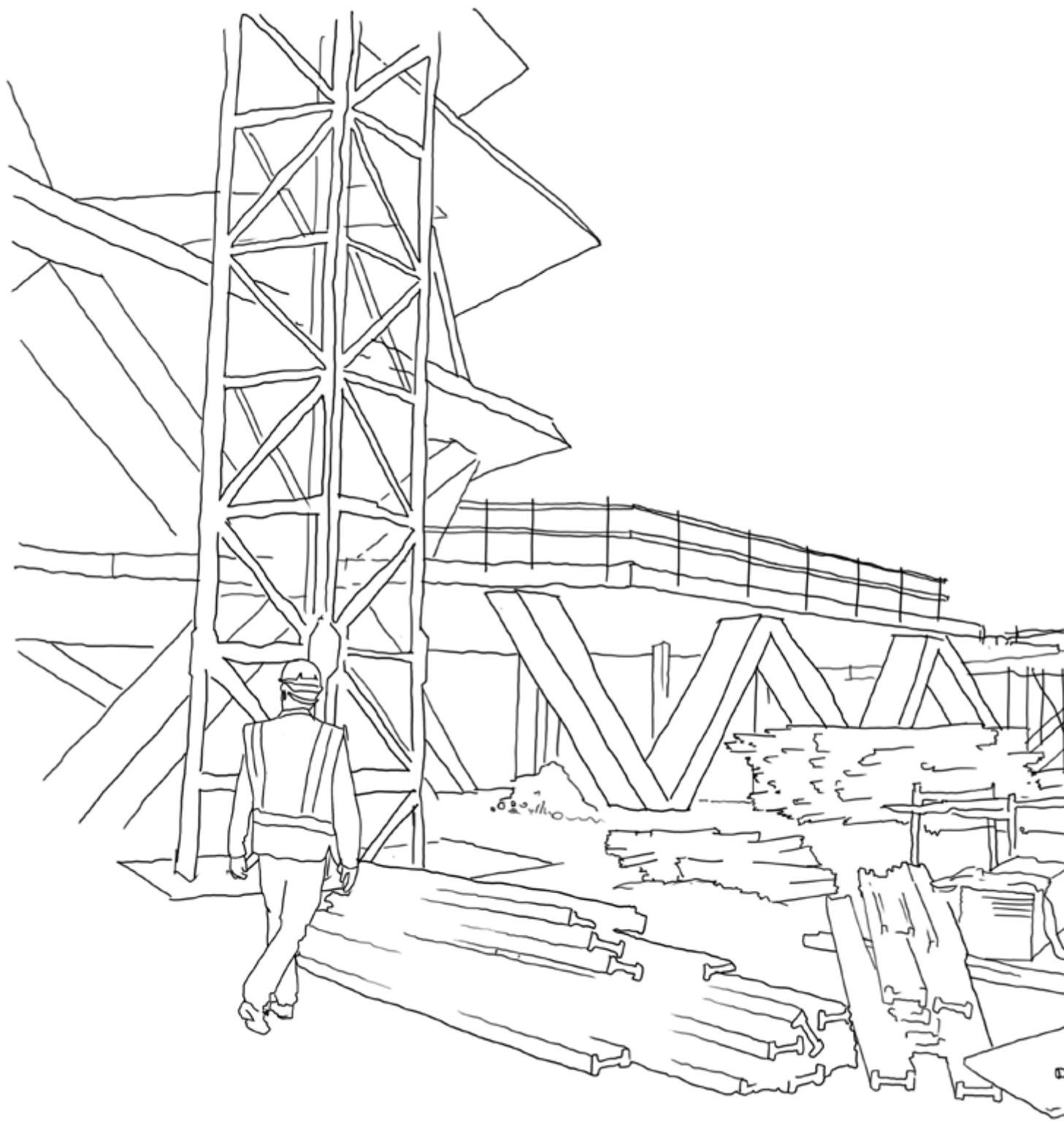
Source: Flickr @Tofil44

#### **Opposite page**

Henri-Konan-Bédié bridge in Abidjan.

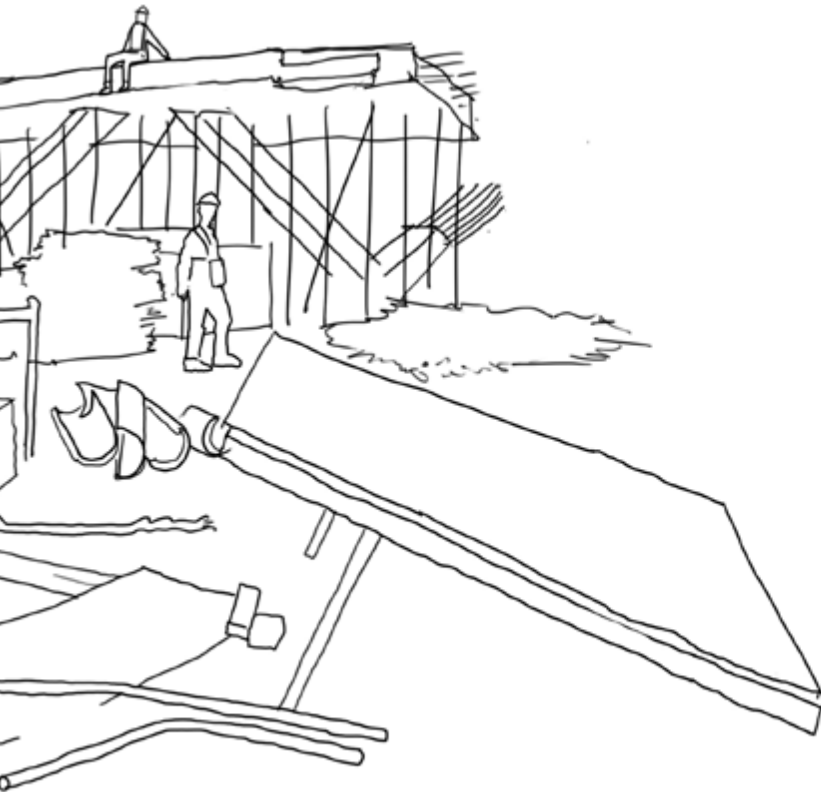
Source Bouyugues





4

# RESULTS





This chapter takes the issues that emerged from the analysis of theory about African cities and Airport City's practices and forms and reframes them by integrating practical problems with theory and vice-versa. Nine issues are selected among the many that emerge from the analysis. They are divided into three fields: Architecture, Urban and Research. The issues include: the implications of globalization on the architect's profession, sustainability, technical knowledge transfer, planning, informality, land rights, data accuracy, the de-westernization of urban theory; and an overview of the contemporary geographies of knowledge. Each issue is introduced by quotes from those who mentioned its importance in the previous chapters.

Three couples of photographic collages constructed as urban "scenes" are the result of the montage of selected portions of the pictures shown in the previous chapter. The selection is intentionally subjective and provocative, and it is utilized to show how easy it can be to show only "one side of the picture". These collages themselves do not have the ambition to show "all the sides" of the issues that they represent. They depict the different sides of Airport City. Shiny skyscrapers against the decay of abandoned buildings, the differences between how public and private accesses are managed, and ultimately the different layers of market economies that coexist: the global-formal empty shops and the local-informal bustling street vendors. All the pictures utilized were taken within the relatively small Airport City business district. The variety of forms and dynamics that a contemporary city like Accra can offer are beyond imagination. This research starts from here, but extends its grasp beyond the limits of Airport City, to any other ordinary city.



## SCENE 1.1: FORMAL DESIGN









## SCENE 1.2: INFORMAL EXECUTION



## 4.1 ARCHITECTURE ISSUES

From the analysis, three main issues emerge: the globalization of the architecture profession and its implications in its local practice, the issue of sustainability and its relationship with architecture, and the challenges of construction in contexts with limited resources.

### 4.1.1. The Profession

I wanted our first project to be somehow iconic and knowing them personally, I was convinced that their style and attention to building sustainability could have worked well in this type of situation. By the time that I moved to Ghana, in the spring of 2010, I knew that they would have been our architects [...] A big difference between developing in Ghana or in Europe for us was that local laws required our architects and engineers to select a local partner for each discipline. We offered to provide some assistance by helping them with the selection process by shortlisting a few candidates for each of them. These local counterparts are required by law to sign the projects before they are finalized and ideally should provide foreign consultants with local expertise and insight about how to operate in Accra [...] The first problem that we had was that when we were about to begin with the construction of the structure, Politecnica and Micheletti still had not defined a commonly agreed technical solution for the project façade, the diagrid. It was an extremely complex problem, as every joint between the beams was unique and had to be imported from Italy and cast on-site. There was very little room for error. In any case, they went on to build some mockups directly on-site and somewhat learned “in the process” [...] Western Architecture firms do not realize that in emerging countries there is a much smaller variety of materials and technical possibilities than in Europe. The first step that a foreign architect should take before designing something in an emerging country like Ghana is to conduct a survey about what is actually available in the country in terms of materials and technologies. It might sound banal, but it is something that is very hard to find in the current architecture landscape.

Carlo Matta

The practice of architecture in the past decades has become increasingly globalized. In Ghana, foreign construction managers have been around for almost a century now (Laryea & Mensah, 2010), and Tropical Architecture has had a heavy influence on the urban and architectural identity of the urban landscape (Okoye, 2002). Nonetheless, in recent years, the spread of professional skills and modern technologies around the world has increased in speed, and has expanded the markets for design services, while competition increases in both developed and developing nations.

Professional practice in architecture has long had an international component and a cosmopolitan outlook. Participation of U.S. firms) and from the neo-colonial investments of U.S. corporations. But until recently most practices have been organized around a local, regional, or national framework. Globalization has changed all that. Enabled by digital and telecommunications technologies, by advanced international business services, and by the emergence of clients with transnational operations and a cosmopolitan sensibility, the portfolio of many architecture firms has an international component and the scope of operations of many of the largest firms is now truly global. (Knox & Taylor, 2005)

Architecture firms aggressively market themselves abroad and compete successfully for prestigious international commissions. The creation of regional entities such as the European Union has removed long-standing barriers to practice further contributing to the internationalization of the profession. Since it is impossible to estimate the number of international commissions, an indication of the increased globalization of architecture can be found in the cumulative number of branch offices opened in different global regions. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 these have increased from less than 20 to more than 150 (see figure 1<sup>1</sup>). Of the 55 large architectural practices with offices in other global regions, 80% have their head offices in English-speaking countries and even the two Hong Kong firms were founded in the nineteenth-century colonial period by UK expatriates (see figure 2). Globalized commercial

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1 Survey by Robert Adam (Adam, 2008) of architectural firms with total worldwide staff over 75 with branch offices in global regions other than region of head office, taken from BD Survey, 'World Architecture 100', January 2007. Offices with two or more technical staff. Response rate 52 of 55. Global regions are: Africa, Australasia, Central Asia, Central/Eastern Europe, Middle East, North America, Pacific Rim and China, South and Central America, Western Europe.



architecture has developed a symbiotic relationship with a new breed of global star architects. As cities, more than nations, now compete to attract global investment and global tourism, they seek brand differentiation and symbolic modernity. As Robert Adams notes, the commissioning of public buildings by star architects is now an established marketing technique: the buildings must be extra-ordinary and designed by one of a small band of global architects whose nationality is more accidental than significant (Adam, 2008).

The internationalization of the design practice forces us to confront tensions between different value-systems. It is tempting to view architects and other designers as members of a global, cosmopolitan culture that transcends national boundaries and identities (Wickersham, 2007).

Their drawings, their technologies, their clients, even their workforces may seem flow easily from one continent or one culture to another. Yet architects must still confront the stubborn, sometimes intractable demands of nationalism. The organization of the construction industry varies widely from nation to nation, with profound consequences for building design. National and local governments have not faded away – and neither have the legal barriers they have erected to protect local business and artists from foreign competition. (Ibid.)

International design practice must also confront differing cultural norms, and issues of equity between rich and poor nations. Wickersham asks, “what is the architect’s responsibility for projects that fail to comply with evolving international norms for building safety, or environmental assessment, or preservation of cultural heritage? How should one deal with repressive or corrupt clients? Do architects in developed nations have an ethical duty to assist in the transfer of new skills to local architects – even at the risk of pricing themselves out of those markets? How should architects weigh the social costs and legal risks of outsourcing production jobs to cheaper providers abroad?” (Ibid.). These questions underscore the new reality of architectural practice: globalization affects every practitioner, even those who never leave their home nations.

Furthermore, the translation of design into construction brings the architect up against the local nature of building:

The forces of globalization are slowest where transactions involve the transfer of physical quantities, like building materials. How the building industry organizes itself in a particular country also involves cultural assumptions – even the point at which the architect’s responsibility for design ends, and the contractor’s responsibility for construction starts, may vary widely from place with place. Failure to appreciate these differences can profoundly effect a project’s chances of success. (Ibid. p.8)

In the theoretical representation of architecture practice, the discourse shifts from architectural objects to the “global chain of productive relations that is embedded within the structures and materials of buildings” (Crysler, 2000). During the 1980’s, Frampton, voiced concern over the relentless and universal transformation of the built environment that has resulted from the use of optimized technology in the manufacturing of building elements. This was the result of the same time–space compression: as people, information and goods become more mobile, they are subjected to fiercer economic and social competition (Walker, 2001). The Critical Regionalist critique was that this would result in worse products. On the other hand, scholar Dana Cuff, (1991, 2000) specifically addressed the contradictions found in the discussion of architectural regionalism and architectural localism, being particularly skeptical of Frampton’s ideas on critical regionalism in a time when architectural practice was becoming increasingly global. According to Frampton, the fundamental strategy of critical regionalism is to attain, as economically as possible, a balance between elements that are universal and those derived from a particular place, in order to give the architecture a unique and independent identity (Walker, 2001). Cuff instead argues that, in retrospect, Frampton underestimated the powerful effect that the global economy would have on local economies, and architecture. Indeed, architecture, joined with modern technologies – in this global declination – has proven to have the power to influence the lives of people from across the world in ways that would have been probably unimaginable before. Communities living in the opposite corners of the world are now connected (Dunham-Jones, 2000) and global mega-projects involve the movement of thousands of people (Olds, 2000).

Globalization offers an array of embodied aesthetic experiences that occur within, rather than in opposition to, the expanding space of a capitalist world system. It is a system whose multiple scales and complexities are sometimes impossible to see or feel in any concrete manner, but which exert enormous influence in determining the limits and possibilities of our lives. (Crysler, 2000)

Some argue that this form of understanding should find its place in architectural education, for if theory were permitted to reflect more on specific affiliations between architecture and power on a global scale, it would further allow practices to be more receptive to change. And changed it has, over the past few decades.

#### **4.1.2. Sustainability**

The architecture of the bungalows is the key element of the Colonial period, and it is important to take notice that its characteristics were developed across different continents and countries from India to Africa. Yet, the principles are the same. It is very contextualized architecture in terms of its response to the climatic conditions in that it encourages outdoor experience [...] Nowadays, some elements of traditional Colonial architecture have become aestheticized and represent a style, a status symbol. Their purpose is lost, or at least it has changed: it was born out of the need to survive harsh climatic conditions and developed to be aesthetically pleasing, while today it is built for aesthetic reasons and has lost any kind of significance in terms of its climatic performance [...] This is both a cultural and a design challenge. Steering the taste of the elite towards an increasingly sustainable architecture is fully within the possibilities of contemporary architects. It is a challenge that is rarely taken up by architects and that at the same time cannot work without an illuminated government and middle class, that somehow recognizes the additional value that this type of architectural products represent.

Joe Osae-Addo

Private clients do not seem to understand or in any case care much about the concept of added long-term value to the project. In my experience, they would rather spend on expensive furniture and material finishes than for example on more efficient components or energy saving solutions.

That extra-step is still missing[...] The same thing applies to the choice of materials, although in this case, another factor gets in the way, that is the status that some of these materials seem to grant. Clients are willing to spend more for products like Italian or Spanish tiles for example, even when they are not of any particularly good quality. Many times they are third or fourth choices, exported from Europe and which present many imperfections. Yet, their origins and the status that they carry with them make their value, and that is something that I have found most clients to be willing to spend for. Other times they are premium quality imported products, which in addition to being very expensive by themselves, require the workers to arrive from abroad in order to mount them and install them properly. Of course, we are always talking about wealthy clients that would be able to afford these type of luxuries, but only few of them are willing to invest in better quality products. The interesting thing is that those who do experiment these solutions are always incredibly satisfied with them, and after they see the results, they can really appreciate the difference. In the past couple of years there has been a visible – albeit still quite slow – increase in the demand for these type of products, which is mostly to be attributed to word of mouth and personal recommendations. It is a slow process but there are some encouraging signals.

Alessandro Masoni

Interestingly, the African academy's engagement with architectural history, apart from the fact that it is based in the now traditional and myopic idea of a modernist Day 1, was instigated in the context of a perceived threat, one only marginally related to Maxwell Fry's idea that African historical architecture (were such a category imaginable) offered nothing of value to contemporary architectural practice. The greater threat lay elsewhere. Given that the modern state in Africa is relatively weak in that it has few resources to enforce its own laws, the idea that the architect is the only creator whose design proposals had first to be approved by building inspectors and planning authorities before construction could proceed is in reality nonexistent (though articles of registration and the sanctions they impose on the noninitiated are on the law books). Anyone can, where enforcement is nominal, design and erect a building. *This* is the threat to Architecture. (Okoye, 2002)

To appreciate the 'tropical' response to architectural design in Africa, one needs to consider the core relationship between local building use and their reading of the modern building.

Anthropologists long established that daily transactional life amongst West Africans occurred outdoors, with buildings only performing the function of shelter from more adverse elements such as rainfall, and as places to sleep at the end of the day. The need for appropriate passive cooling and environmental design could on the one hand thus be relevant to those who worked in the small formal Western sector, and not that of the masses, who were quite able to negotiate their own ideal comfort zone in day to day life; literally by sitting in the shade with a cooling breeze in the midday sun. (Uduku, 2006, p. 7)

When considered in relation to the knowledge that most vernacular architecture has adequate thermal insulation to provide comfort in the evening and early morning, when sleeping occurs, there is a question as to what this new form of environmental conditioning brought to everyday life. Furthermore, as Jiat-Hwee Chang and Anthony D. King stress, it is becoming increasingly hard to conceptualize 'tropical architecture' as a depoliticized entity rather than a power-knowledge configuration inextricably linked to asymmetrical colonial power relations (Chang & King, 2011). Reading the writings of Jane Drew, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe similarly notes, how Tropical Modernism carried in itself "the well-intentioned but residually superior attitude toward African society that she shared with Fry and the reformist colonial officials they befriended limited the participation of the native population" (Liscombe, 2006, p. 7).

The instruments and ideas of decolonization, while intended to liberate, were nonetheless being directed along trajectories defined by the alien colonizers; the transformative potential claimed by modernist polemic was similarly controlled. Neither Fry and Drew nor their colonial and denominational clients fully comprehended the paradox that the new educational construction they were enabling reinforced the hegemony of British colonial rule by its accommodation of the pressures for independence. That is, by offering West Africa a modern system of education and modernist architectural practice, colonial policy imposed a



foreign pedagogy and associated cultural ethos, only partially modified to local conditions, within which devolution could safely unfold. The modernist idiom embodied a complex, and even contradictory, set of factors and assumptions about political and cultural change. While Fry and Drew's approach to design acknowledged local knowledge, customs, and social practices, and took into account local topography and climate, they also participated in the colonial project to import European techniques and aims that would change those African conditions. (Liscombe, 2006, p. 194)

Today, it is important to keep in mind that the discourse about sustainable architecture often carries similar implications in terms of the cultural and economic power dynamics that its narratives often imply.

The growing popularity of sustainability in the building sector is underlined by the number of sustainable and green building certificates and tools available today, such as LEED in the United States, BREEAM in the United Kingdom, and DGMB in Germany. Despite the popularity of sustainability and the clear importance of the building sector in the process of environmental change (the built environment is estimated to be responsible for a third of the anthropogenic emissions that will be released by 2030) the number of sustainable, green, or energy-efficient buildings that have actually been built remains low. In January 2013, only 12,849 buildings in the world had been certified by LEED, 254,000 by BREEAM, and 435 by DGNB.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is that many people believe that sustainable construction needs extra effort, work, and most importantly, money. Several studies show, despite the savings that derive from lowered utility costs, the additional expenses of sustainable buildings (including additional planning, material, and certification costs) hardly pay off over the building's anticipated lifespan. Some argue that this is because value in real estate generally means "financial value" (Wallbaum & Feige, 2014).

It's determined by investors, who buy and sell buildings on the market at a price based primarily on the costs and earnings associated with the building. However, there are more ways of valuing sustainability than through money alone.

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2 For further reference see: [breeam.org](http://breeam.org), [dgnb.de](http://dgnb.de), [usgbc.org/leed](http://usgbc.org/leed).

We need to broaden the definition of “value” in real estate to take into account the additional value creation, both financial and nonfinancial, of sustainable constructions. (Ibid.)

They argue that, as opposite to market value, other values such as social value, value in use, and cultural value cannot be so easily calculated or quantified. However, this does not mean that they are less important. This also applies to other type of values like sign value: social status, prestige, and identity. It is an established fact in Real Estate theory that private investors also considering emotional value, sign value, social value, and market value (Poorvu, 1999). These different categories of property values all have, or are influenced, by certain property characteristics that can be integrated into calculations of profitability. Today, more and more major companies and institutional investors in the construction market are shifting toward a holistic value perspective, which is promoted by corporate social-responsibility policies and an increasing consciousness in the market of these nonfinancial values. Value is also created indirectly by enhanced quality of life and work or by decreased external effects. For example Actis, the investment company behind Laurus, pretends a third party assessment of the social and economic sustainability of each of his developments, in addition to the energetic one. The theory behind this is that, in addition to the general public benefit, this translates into direct financial value by generating higher sales and rental prices for sustainable buildings.

The assumption that sustainable construction costs more needs to be challenged, not only because it's dubious (the WBCSB and the US Environmental Protection Agency put the cost difference between green and conventional construction at only a few percentage points<sup>3</sup>) but also because it's founded on an outmoded way of evaluating the profitability of a building. The calculations we use to define profitability balance the initial investment in a building against its long-term operating costs and expected market price. A building's true price, however, goes beyond what it costs to buy the components, hire the labor, and maintain the finished product (Ruby, Ruby, & Janson, 2014).

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3 See Energy Efficiency in Buildings and “Green Building: Frequent Questions,” United States Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/greenbuilding/pubs/faqs.htm#14>.

Profitability calculations do not reflect our growing awareness of a building's social, ecological, and financial impacts throughout its lifecycle – from resource extraction, processing, and transport to manufacturing, use, repair, maintenance, and eventually disposal and recycling. These impacts include lost carbon sinks when trees are cut down for lumber, the carbon released into the atmosphere when that lumber is transported, the environmental harm associated with heating and cooling the building, health costs to the workers who construct the building or those who work in it, and the material wasted when destroying or renovating a building. (Ibid. p.27)

Until a holistic metric to track the far-reaching benefits of sustainable construction and the hidden costs of conventional construction across all of these scales is developed, the true prices of buildings will be difficult to measure and the market will continue to favor conventional buildings. Today, it is still more profitable to build in a way that is detrimental to the environment. This is certainly due to the fact that the contemporary economic system separates the health of a business from the health of the society in which it is based and the health of the greater ecosystem, with the latter being treated essentially as a resource to drive growth. Few stakeholders can dedicate political and financial capital to long-term issues such as climate change when their performance is judged on a timetable of biannual elections and quarterly profit reports. The symptoms of climate change and the financial crisis manifest far from their original sources, therefore private enterprises are rarely held accountable for the detrimental impacts they have on the environment and society. Also, the relationship between construction and climate change is hard to communicate: in a survey of American homeowners, almost three quarters of respondents believed that their homes had no or an “acceptable” impact on the environment.<sup>4</sup> While individuals and commercial enterprises continue their unsustainable practices, states and the global community at large absorb the costs.

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4 Robert Charles Lesser & Co., LLC, *Green Building Is Coming to a Market Near You. Are You Ready?* (Washington, DC: RCLCO, 2007), <http://www.usgbcncr.org/Documents/GreenMarketSnapshot>.

### 4.1.3. Construction

The greatest challenge about this job for me was to learn how to mediate between designing the ideal technical solutions to the issues at hand, while at the same time assessing the actual possibilities for them to be implemented locally [...] Well, locally, there is a very limited array of skills that are available. It is very hard to find a carpenter that is actually a carpenter. There is a lot of improvisation going on, and that can cause many problems as you can imagine. I expected a certain scarcity in terms of local materials and technologies, but having to design and draw something, knowing that it has to be the simplest and clearest drawing and structure possible, and that it will be built without any of the instruments that one would normally use made it the biggest challenge [...] At the beginning, this project did not seem to offer any possibilities for expression, design-wise. Yet, it is thanks to the many limits in terms of construction materials, technologies and skills that it has found its direction and, at the end of the process, the final result will surely have a clear identity and purpose. Every choice and decision was rooted in a specific reason and all its limits have stripped the design bare of any unnecessaryness.

Alessandro Masoni

There is no will to invest in better construction techniques or quality materials in this market, as architects and contractors are constantly asked to spend as little as possible, often sacrificing quality over flashy aesthetics. All the fixtures and materials should be as cheap as possible, therefore reducing the life cycle of the building while increasing dramatically its maintenance costs and this is something that I still find difficult to accept as a builder.

Jimmy Castagna

The limits of local availability of construction materials, elements, technologies and skills are recurring issues in the recounts of Alessandro Masoni and Jimmy Castagna, while Joe Addo sees them as challenges that could be exploited to ignite local creativity. Tropical Architecture has been the ancestor of the modern trend for sustainable architecture, yet, as it has been illustrated in the previous chapters, it apparently depended more on the challenges posed by the availability of construction materials and technologies, rather than climate.

Today, international universities experiment with different solutions to tackle the issue of sustainable housing (Franco, 2015), but in the meantime, in Accra, safety and quality problems persist, as symbolized by the collapse due to construction defects of a shopping mall in central Accra in 2012 and three other buildings since (African Centre for Cities, 2012; “Dossier: Melcom Shop Collapse,” 2012; Hamilton, 2012; NewsGhana, 2014).

Nowadays, issues of form in contemporary practice have a tendency to take priority over issues of construction. In turn, illustration and rendering techniques are being prioritized over form. This reality of our time reflects the ease with which we now employ digital media to convey ideas. However, in many projects the construction of the building itself presents an opportunity for the architect to design and create beyond the two-dimensional image. Jeanne Gang (2010), from the architecture studio Studiogang, compares these issues to those commonly faced by three other characters: the cook, the prospector and the nomad. She uses these three metaphors to illustrate their approach towards building utilizing local resources:

Construction materials have unique physical characteristics that are underexplored or have yet to be discovered, making it possible and exciting to work with them as generative forces for a project, rather than relying on form or imagery as a starting point. A building has the potential to be “about concrete,” for example, in much the same way as a painting can be “about paint.” (Gang, 2010)

To create a building “about material” is not the same as to refine material and construction techniques in buildings. There are many architects who aspire to perfect their craft and whose work represents a lifetime of continual refinement.

### The Cook

Before the mass industrialization of agriculture and the construction of modern infrastructure made nearly any food available anywhere, at any time of year, cooks had to both shrewdly plan and improvise each day to create delicious dishes from what was actually available. Today, with the growing popularity of the local and slow food movements, cooks are choosing to return to this way of working—challenging themselves to prepare delectable meals using only

those ingredients that are naturally available in their specific location and growing season. This necessitates a certain kind of experimental approach, different from the exotic-combination zeal of those who have every food imaginable at their disposal. It also requires cooks to work with more intention, anticipating what will become available and how it can be incorporated with the staple goods already in supply. It is essential for these cooks to remain flexible and open to every sort of culinary possibility, and to making adjustments to their original menu, if they are to please palates and pocketbooks.

### The Prospector

Since prehistoric times, we, as humans, have looked to (or below) the earth for the materials we cannot grow or cultivate ourselves. Though mining has evolved immensely over the intervening 45,000 years, today the same basic steps still comprise the mining process. Prospecting is the initial exploratory phase in which a material deposit is sought through physical means. Once discovered, its feasibility for mining is analyzed, by measuring the deposit's estimated value against the cost of its removal, or excavation. Excavation methods have varied widely, based on the material resource type and its location, but the vast majority of removal techniques have all been extremely destructive to their natural environments. This could be different if mining was refocused on the man-made world—if architects took the same evaluation framework and used it to locate and exploit a new resource: the built environment. The prospecting architect could mitigate the environmental degradation typically concurrent with new construction by locating materials that have already been used, evaluating their potential, and giving them new life in architecture. From leftover steel to pulverized rubber, bulk quantities of useful things pass through metropolitan areas on a daily basis. In many contexts there are salvage industries whose sole purpose is to sort, store, and resell materials from this plethora of resources. The only real issue preventing their reuse in construction is that these materials are not always in a finished condition, ready to be transferred into architecture—they currently require the curiosity and persistence of a prospector to locate and utilize.

### The Nomad



Most of the industrial world measures success by mass. The more tons of concrete a plant produces, for example, the more successful it is perceived to be. A powerful alternative model is provided by the concept of “lightness”, as it is inherently understood by nomadic peoples. Working as a collective, nomads transport themselves and their provisions from place to place. Their transient way of life is characterized by few material possessions and a deep connection to nature. Their portable habitations are designed to be as light as possible, without sacrificing strength and protection, and adaptable to varying climate and site conditions. Learning from the nomad, architectural practice can expand beyond the obvious lightweight fabric tensile structures, to pursue a more holistic notion of “lightness”: one which seeks adaptability and a deeper connection to the environment through considering the structure’s relationship to its climate and typology. Interesting new possibilities for design and construction arise as we consider reducing weight, materials, and their environmental burden.

Mimicking nomads, architects who design for lightness achieve inventive solutions as they explore using less material with greater strength. This recognition of the dynamic natural cycles of a project’s site and context, and the design of spaces that offer people, as users of the architecture, a direct connection to those evokes is an equally important strategy toward reinventing construction with an ecological purpose.

Ultimately, as Chrisna du Plessis and Holger Wellbaum note, the world is not short of technical solutions to the problems of environmental sustainability, but convincing stakeholders to adopt these solutions is another matter (du Plessis & Wallbaum, 2010). This is particularly true in the building and construction sector, where the complexity of the construction process, the diverse drivers of the many players involved, and the challenges of sustainability requirements are posed to a “deeply entrenched status quo” (Ibid. p.355), and come together in a tightly coupled system with dynamics that actively discourage meaningful change in construction processes and practice.

The question we need to ask is how best to encourage behavior change in such a complex environment? Traditional measures tend to be aimed at individual actors, and come as

either carrots in the form of financial benefit (e.g. subsidies, tax breaks, reduced operational costs) or increased status and competitive edge (more stars, silver to platinum medals), or in the form of sticks (levies and taxes, fines and regulatory control). These are applied using a range of quantitative performance targets that should, in theory, add up to sustainability. However, these mechanisms are themselves not sustainable because they require constant external intervention. The behaviors encouraged in this way do not arise out of the requirements of the (narrowly defined) system itself, and they target [...] the least effective leverage points in a complex system. More effective measures would aim at changing the overall goals of the system, as these arise from a changed paradigm and worldview, and encouraging the ability of the system to self-organize and evolve to support these changed and changing goals. (Ibid. p.356)

The global challenges of sustainability, new scientific theories about how the world works, and the technological breakthroughs of the past 150 years combine represent a fundamentally interconnected and interdependent system, one in which conceptual boundaries between economies, nations, disciplines, and the individual and his/her environment are rapidly disappearing. In that sense, this conceptualization of the globalized contemporary landscape carries two main implications:

The first lies in the value system that underlies the actions of, and relationships between, stakeholders, including the relationships with voiceless stakeholders, the natural environment, and future generations. This value system is informed by an understanding of an interconnected and interdependent world, one that is co-created through the relationships found in global to local socio-ecological systems, and is shaped by the quality of those relationships. Such a shift in value system will require incentives that expand the notion of enlightened self-interest from the individual to the individual as part of the whole.

The second would be a re-definition of the stakeholders and their roles, one that moves beyond the traditional nexus of built-environment professionals, developers/clients, and government as the actors responsible for creating the built environment. Governments or developers do not drive the rapid urbanisation globally, but instead it is individuals, often poor and marginalised, and their choices that drive

this shift. Acknowledging the role of the citizen in creating the built environment, and thus changing the role of the individual, from a powerless affected individual to a powerful creative stakeholder, will allow the sustainability agenda to harness the incredible energy and power of self-organization. The tools to motivate change would need to be accessible to these citizens, relevant to their needs and behavioural drivers, and reinforce their ability to self-organize and evolve. Here the technologically enabled phenomenon of our increasingly interconnected and complex social networks can play a huge role in creating awareness, mobilizing action, building a shared vision, transferring knowledge, and ultimately changing worldviews and value systems. (Ibid. p.357)

The shift towards a sustainable construction industry in cities that grow at such fast pace and in environment characterized by conservative mindset and limited resources are great. It depends on a shift from short to long-term planning which has been hard to achieve even across the most technologically advanced and educated countries. This would benefit the urban environment ecologically, but also financially and socially, thanks to the new industries that could arise from this new economy.

## SCENE 2.1: PUBLIC HURDLES





TAM  
#16







## SCENE 2.2: PRIVATE ACCESS



## 4.2 URBAN ISSUES

The three main issues that the analysis encountered when it came to the urban scale are: planning, or rather its lack of-, the relationship between informal activities and the urban environment, and land rights.

### 4.2.1. Planning

The purpose of our buffer zone, where the buildings are still relatively sparse and mostly built by the government after Independence, was to leave some space between the African and the European settlements. In this way, the wind would not to carry any insects from one place to the other.

Nkrumah's first instinct was to scrap any signs of colonial influence, and with them, the masterplan drafted by Fry, Trevallion and Flood. The redevelopment of the coastal area of Accra was canceled, and European Reservation Areas were abolished. I see [Accra] becoming an integral part of a regional network of urban centers, like Lagos, Abidjan, Monrovia, Dakar. The role of the government will also be different, since it will be hard for them to compete with the multitude of powers, actors and layers that interact within these urban centers. Private businesses will increasingly contribute to both urban and regional development. For example, activating synergies to plan and execute the construction of a regional corridor to improve inter-regional trading.

Nat Nunoo Amarteifio

Abidjan is different from most African cities, in that since its first conception it was set to become a "big" city. This was carried forward by the first government in collaboration with French companies and resulted in solid infrastructure and a carefully laid-out urban plan, which has been able to withstand the past thirty years of negligence without compromising its efficiency. Today, there are no power cuts or water supply issues in Abidjan. This is also due to the fact that in the seventies and eighties, much of the public infrastructure services have been privatized, which eventually helped them to rank among the most efficient in the region.

Ivan Cornet

A construction manager, or an architect coming from abroad, should be ready to reset his needs and priorities, if he does not want to be overwhelmed by these differences, which would ultimately make it impossible to work here. They should be ready to adapt. In all but the most expensive areas, the idea of setting up the infrastructures before starting the construction of any type of building does not apply. Even in the latest business districts like Airport City, there is no water drainage system or sewers. Road networks, electricity lines, water supply are developed in parallel, or even after the construction of the buildings. There is no coordination between them and this ex-post approach certainly does not result in their efficiency under any point of view. This is the status-quo in Accra, and in many other African cities, and I understand that it can be difficult to accept for someone coming from developed countries.

[...]I must know whether that area has electricity or not, and if there is running water available, otherwise I should provide with the necessary generators and tanks. I must know how long it will take for the supplier to provide the materials, and think about how to get it to the construction site.

Jimmy Castagna

...The other issue is that plans and regulations are chronically lagging behind the market and the construction activities.

Joe Osae-Addo

In their research paper “Who really governs urban Ghana,” Mohammed Awal and Jeffrey Paller note how economic policy and management have failed to deliver macroeconomic stability or appropriate responses to the continued informalization of the economy in Ghana (Awal & Paller, 2016).

Election-related fiscal indiscipline is normal. Moreover, rent seeking and corruption, particularly by the country’s ruling and bureaucratic elites, have become more pervasive. Democratic governance is not benefiting the public good.

In an April 2013 survey of 16 Accra slum communities, 94% of respondents had a voter identification card, 24% had a passport, 48% had a bank account and 42% had a national identification card.<sup>5</sup> Two-thirds were employed in the informal economy. The results of the survey run contrary to portrayals of slums as havens for vagrants and criminals cut

off from the state. The role of the state and the relationship between informal networks and government officials merits close attention. Citizens interact and engage with elected officials, but not always in conventional ways. Slum politics is messy, complex and misunderstood.

The struggle for political power in Ghana's cities hinges on the control of access to housing and the provision of tenure security. This is most readily apparent in Accra. Historically, neither the state, nor private developers have been able to meet demands for secure, quality and affordable housing. UN-Habitat estimates that 5.7 million new rooms are needed in Ghana by 2020. At present, up to 90% of housing is built and governed informally, outside of local authority control. (Ibid. p.3)

In her address to the 2006 World Planners Congress, Anna Tibaijuka, who was then Executive Director of UN-Habitat, pointed out that planning is often “anti-poor”, and can increase social exclusion in cities. She criticized the widespread belief that “in the planned city [...] the poor should at best be hidden or at worst swept away”. Tibaijuka called on planning practitioners to develop a different approach to planning that was sustainable, pro-poor and inclusive – placing the creation of livelihoods at the center of planning. Yet, from this analysis of a city's business district, it emerges, that planning, or its lack of – can also be anti-business. After Tibaijuka's address to the congress in 2006, little has changed. According to Pieterse, “the dominant policy response to the deepening crisis associated with urban growth and expansion [in Africa] is inertia” (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014, p. 206). While there are many inspirational and progressive planners across the continent, others have few qualms about fulfilling the role of compliant “handmaidens of repression” – governmental or economic. The planning profession in Africa has been choked by acute political, institutional and financial constraints (Watson & Agbola, 2013).

In general, the state has been discredited in West African societies. As partisan and clientelistic, it has abdicated its role as mediator, thus leaving conflicts and competition to take unusual forms, particularly in urban situations. The city, being the place where competition reigns between individuals, between groups, between ethnic groups, between urban old and new, is also the framework of competition between those capable of mobilizing resources, whatever their nature

(financial, land, political, symbolic) and those who cannot. Poverty and its consequences in the degradation of the environment and the infrastructure are the best proof of it. Being the site of the modern economy and of the state, it is where general confrontation is deployed. Its main stake is access to urban resources, international aid, public functions, and economic and political incomes. Reduced trust in the state has had enormous consequences. (Diouf, 2007, p. 103)

The city is the place where Africa inserts itself into modernity (Diouf, 2007, p. 103). The fact is that, as Okui Enwezor puts it, the syntax of African cities today is not defined by the “modern” grammar inherited from colonialism, nor by the assumption of an organic connection between individual and collective memory, of testimonies and beliefs. “In these cities, everything is interpreted and outlined by the apparent chaos of the everyday, where forms of self-organizing procedures, parallel and informal economies, and the resilience and inventiveness of urban dwellers have relentlessly kept many cities still functional” (Enwezor, 2002, p. 7).

Patsy Healey (1997) reframes the Western concept of planning itself in contemporary Western societies. In Western countries, planning systems were designed with conceptions of integrated and self-contained local economies and societies in mind, not the open and global-reaching relationships that characterize much of today’s local economies and social life. In Europe it was assumed that the state could ‘take charge’ and ‘control’ spatial organization and the location of development, in contrast to the current interest in the combination of flexible enabling and regulatory governance which permeates much current thinking about public policy. Spatial and environmental planning systems and practices are a part of the governance relations of a country, a region and a place, and must be understood as both inside ‘formal’ government but also as deeply connected to local business and social life. This interrelation happens through social networks that provide systems of meaning and intellectual, social and political capital, which can help to both mobilize and limit policy and action of these policies.

Planning practice is thus not an innocent, value-neutral activity. It is deeply political. It carries value and expresses power. The power lies in the formal allocation of rights

and responsibilities, in the politics of influence, the practices through which 'bias' is mobilised, and in the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in cultural practices. (Healey, 1997, p. 84)

Planners often claim that citizens do not understand strategy, so there is little point in consulting them. Healey suggests that the problem might lie in the way 'consultation' is conceived and carried out. "To change systems, and to re-make structures, requires [...] a recognition, as Foucault argues, of the power relations of the fine grain of practices" (Ibid. p.85).

Planning work is not just about the substance or specific context of issues. It is also about how issues are discussed, and how problems are defined and strategies to address them articulated. Questions of process as a result are as important to local environmental planning as questions of substantive content[...]It is an activity conducted by, and in relation to, specific people concerned about specific places. How it works out is contingent upon the particular history and geography of these places. (Healey, 1997, p. 86)

It also must not become just a response to problems, since it has the potential actively to shape, or frame, the development of entire cities and in some cases, countries. It contributes to the enterprise of building up institutional capacity in urban regions, through ways of thinking and ways of organizing over issues to do with co-existence in shared spaces.

The context of planning is not just a physical 'box' enclosing an 'action space' for planning activity. The context is actively present in the planning activity, and is itself re-make through such activity. Spatial and environmental planning practices are embedded in specific contexts, through the institutional histories of particular places and the understanding that are brought forward by the various participating groupings, and the processes through which issues are discussed, through this double activity of embedded framing, spatial and environmental planning practices thus both reflect the context of power relations and carry power themselves.

Planning is not merely about the technical capability in producing master plans or subdivision layouts, though this may be a part of a local planning process. Nor is it just about technical analysis [...] nor it is about a procedural practice undertaken by supposedly 'value-neutral' experts,



apart from politics and interaction with stakeholders in urban region change. Instead, it becomes a social process built up from the particular social relations of a place. If this is so, then planning processes need to work in ways which inter-relate technical and experiential knowledge and reasoning, which can cope with a rich array of values, penetrating all aspects of the activity and which involve active collaboration between experts and officials in governance agencies and all those with a claim for attention arising from the experience of co-existence in shared places. (Ibid. p.87)

In this interpretation, social polarization is an active, ongoing process of socio-spatial differentiation, through which labels of difference and “otherness” is generated and imposed on the excluded others. Such processes may be exacerbated where public policy for help to those in need concentrates the most needy in particular places, as it has happened in Accra ever since colonial times.

In Accra, the challenge is that the city needs a comprehensive, realistically applicable spatial plan, and it needs it quick. Over the years, many governments have struggled with spatial planning. The focus of authorities was on its economic, rather than urban development. However, as some note, it is expensive not to plan. By deliberately and systematically deciding not to organize the city space, the city becomes a more expensive place to live in. Revenue falls because it is difficult to monitor, track and even collect what is owed to the city. Corruption ripens as a replacement for the mechanisms, which should be provided by the authorities. “Also, you know the traffic situation is really bad when friends from Lagos say that the traffic in Accra is horrendous” (Ecklu, 2015). As local journalist, Grace Ecklu puts it:

Spatial planning lets you know where things are. It is as simple as that. Where are the people, the businesses, and the schools? Who is doing what where? It is the business of any city government to be able to answer these questions. If you know where things are, then you can deal with matters of health, sanitation, environment and transport. Many good projects are happening in Accra but they are not part of one comprehensive master plan. It has been acknowledged that until there is a proper land management information system which is part of an integrated and comprehensive database of activities in the city, the numerous attempts at organizing the city will not mean much[...]Spatial plan-

ning creates the context for economic development to make sense and flourish. You cannot develop in an untidy environment. The foundation has to be right. Every city needs a master spatial plan to chart its future. A plan that will not change according to political seasons and that will reflect the dynamism of an urbanizing country. (Ibid.).

As competition for land intensifies, planning laws assume an even more fundamental importance in the determination of the modalities of urban growth. In many countries besides Ghana, outdated, inappropriate and unintegrated laws are exacerbating urban dysfunction. The reform of planning law is frequently advocated as a necessary step for better management of urbanization in Africa. Yet, reform initiatives consistently founder. For Stephen Berrisford (2013) this is inevitable, given the approaches adopted. The “one-size-fits-all” and “model” planning laws from outside the continent have simply failed in Africa.

More progressive, realistic, urban planning in Africa will require a radically different approach to planning law reform. This is essential for sustainable and equitable urban development in Africa.

This is by any means a daunting task. An urban crisis is being fuelled by growing numbers of inhabitants without access to shelter, basic services or formal employment opportunities. Vigorous, often unrestrained, development of any available and well-located urban land is widespread. Environmental hazards are escalating, compounded by waste, air pollution and the effects of climate change. Conventional urban planning practices and systems that remain trapped in the past are failing to counter these threats.

Nonetheless, local governments are not alone in the drive for a better urban environment. The private property development sector is booming in Africa. The number of residential developments and shopping malls is multiplying rapidly. Most urban development in sub-Saharan Africa is occurring in a completely non-planned and non-transparent manner – despite the existence of master plans.

In the absence of a well-resourced and functioning planning system, development fosters deal making among the influential and financially better-off – rather than compliance with accepted and transparent planning processes. (Watson & Agbola, 2013, p. 4)

In that sense, old and modern master plans are equally exclusionary, albeit in different ways. Older plans, influenced by colonial town planning, incorporate zoning schemes with mono-functional land use, plot sizes and building regulations. These new urban fantasies – more recent urban master plans – assume either that the existing informal city can be scraped away or that new “smart” or “eco” cities on greenfield sites provide a better alternative to upgrading what is on site.

The vast majority of citizens have little choice in either circumstance. They are being edged off better-located land with increasing frequency and ferocity. As the “formal” city becomes ever more inaccessible, informal settlement expands rapidly around, outside and beyond it. As one land expert has put it, the poor have to step outside the law to survive. Current planning systems and practices ensure that social, economic and spatial inequality will continue to persist in African cities. Instead of allocating more of the state expenditure on urban infrastructure to the provision of basic services to the poor, funds are diverted to new developments that aim to attract investment and provide new homes for the affluent minority. (Watson & Agbola, 2013, p. 5)

While the few with an adequate regular income might be able to find rental housing in new “middle-class” suburbs, unplanned urban peripheries people become more distant from urban infrastructure and dislocated from basic services. Sprawling development intensifies the hazards of African cities – inadequate infrastructure and economic opportunity, and greater concentrations of people living in areas at high risk from flooding, disease, fire or landslide. The patterns of industrialization and formal job creation that accompanied urbanization in the global North, are absent from most countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

A new kind of urban “plan” has recently emerged in Africa, created by international Real Estate development companies. Designs for “Hope Cities” like the one designed just outside of Accra (and never realized) are sprouting across the continent.

The fantasy designs for African cities win awards. Typically, they nod in the direction of the needs of shack-dwellers and purport to embrace other laudable aims. But the implementation of plans that are unsustainable in the extreme and inappropriate in terms of climate, available infrastructure

– particularly power – and affordability, exposes their shortcomings. Few of the completed towers of Angola's Nova Cidade de Kilamba are occupied. This Chinese and Brazilianbuilt development 20km south of Luanda, designed to house half a million people, is simply too far away from the capital city, and too expensive for most. (Watson & Agbola, 2013, p. 6)

Nonetheless, as it emerges from the interviews of Carlo Matta and Joe Addo, private development can also become the carrier of more inclusive and shared values. In the absence of requirements from local governments, international investors pretend certain minimum standards for social, economic and environmental sustainability. Real Estate developers have been defined by Anne Haila (2006) as the “neglected builders of global cities.” They participate equally in the global spread of models and images about architecture and urbanization, but also living, social, technological and environmental standards.

#### 4.2.2. Informality

The contact between the street, the public, and the private family courtyard happens through a gate in the female section, which sell the exceeding food on the streets. Hence the road becomes an extension of the private living space. This also allows the kids to play together in the streets since they always remain under the supervision of the female members of the family.

British colonists actively tried to subvert this type of relationship between the private and the public space, in an attempt to “civilize” the African city. This resulted in the separation between some westernized areas and other non-regulated and now over-populated zones, where this type of dynamic survived and only occasionally spills out to the outside.

Nat Nunoo Amarteifio

They should integrate “a bit of the old.” For example, markets. My proposal is to integrate rather than forbid these activities in areas like Airport City. There is economic value in that, and if the government does not realize it, but I am confident that private developers will.

Joe Osae-Addo

Understanding the traditional relationship between public and private place is central in understanding contemporary Accra. Even as entire lives unfold on the side of the busy city streets, the structures that support them are not permanent nor subject to any planning regulation. They are the result of the evolution as the most efficient device in terms of cost, functionality and portability to enable each trader to carry on with his profession. Everything can be bought on the street. Drinks and snacks are the most ubiquitous, but all things from shoes, suits, furniture and appliances can be easily found. Services like type redaction of official documents, faxes and computers are available. The side of the streets is busy and alive with commercial activities during the day, the most appealing spots being naturally shaded.

Informal Accra is a fascinating place, as labyrinthine as its markets. And like any labyrinth, as you explore it more and more often, it slowly becomes familiar. Patterns emerge. Context takes shape. Everyday objects take on new significance, become guides and signposts. Stacks of yellow jerry cans are given a name — the Kufuor Gallon — and a significance — a citywide water delivery failure. A puddle of mud is a would-be football pitch, evidence of inadequate drainage and little planning for public play. A woman selling water from a head pan is a symbol of the lack of formal sector employment and an indication that clean, potable water is a hot commodity. People sleeping in the historic streets of Jamestown point to land rights and an unfocused housing policy. (Benzoni, 2013)

Everything seamlessly disappears as soon as the sun starts to fade, only to resurface the next morning at first light. A thorough analysis of the links between the spatiality of public space and social practices has been carried by Jerome Chenal, in his *The West African City* in which he analyzes pictures taken at different times of day of the streets of Nouakchott, Dakar and Abidjan. Chenal seeks to understand the links between the spatiality of public space and social practices and while doing so, he paints a portrait of the particular relationship that exists between the citizens of these cities and their public spaces, counting how many men, women, children are in the pictures at different times of day, but also which types of vehicles, and if they are moving or standing still. From his analysis though, as exhaustive as it is, it is hard to understand the reasons and the background of this particular attitude towards what we

would define as public space, but that in reality does not really fit well in our definition. Every person selling his products on the side of the street is in that particular place because of negotiations with the other sellers. He or she must behave according to particular rules, but those rules are not enforced by the city's officials, except in places of particular relevance like government buildings.

Private companies recognize the informal sector's ubiquity and power and use it strategically. The telecommunications companies and sachet-water manufacturers use the extensive penetration of the informal sector – a wholesale and distribution infrastructure in its own right – to sell their products. Banks and beer manufacturers have realized the saving and spending power of the informal sector and target products and services to them. (Benzoni, 2013)

The relationship between the authorities and the informal sector is one of hostility, of control, and, sometimes, of repression. The function of the informal sector is to organize the process of urban development by creating employment, without growth in productivity (Diouf, 2007). The growth of demand is satisfied by a corresponding growth in the number of producers of goods and services. It is a sector in transition with a rapidly increasing political weight. The informal sector plays a role in socializing and integrating new migrants. Yet it is often just seen as a major constraint on urban policy, in terms of layout and cleanliness.

Indeed, if the city is a site favorable to accumulation, it is also the seat of power. It is the territory for the expression of indigenous logics and those of "passing visitors," all manifestations that are part of the struggle for power and control of space. At the time of independence, urban planning was situated within the framework of the politics of global organization. As it turns out, it does not necessarily correspond to the logic of those who actually live in the city. With the crisis of control of urban space, the state cannot manage to stop people from allocating plots of land and settling down. It is forced to compromise and share the function of urban management. (Diouf, 2007, p. 105)

Three types of informal settlement exist in urban Ghana: extra-legal, indigenous, and purchased or legitimate (Awal & Paller, 2016). In Awal and Paller's analysis, the type of settlement are differentiated accord-



ing to their different degrees of legitimacy and authority. Ownership of property is in the hands of non-state providers, who rely on local informal social networks embedded in the daily life. These dynamics have not only withstood and adapted to the arrival of multi-party politics but indeed, the expansion of political parties in Ghana has strengthened their power (ibid.). Within this context of weak formal institutions and an housing shortage, local leaders establish territorial authority by founding new neighborhoods, taking in migrant “guests” and strangers, selling land as de jure or de facto landlords, and serving as representatives and speakers for social networks and interest groups. In these informal settlements, leaders gain legitimacy by resolving property disputes, thereby achieving status and prestige, while also extracting rents from claimants and defendants.

In purchased settlements – regarded by the authorities as legitimate because of the way in which the neighbourhood’s land was acquired from customary authorities – landlords have an incentive to provide housing to those who need it. Providing affordable and secure housing to followers increases their legitimacy and authority, giving them the necessary political capital to compete for formal positions of power. Unusually for an African city, in Accra housing in purchased settlements is administered as a common or public good.

In indigenous settlements – neighbourhoods governed by customary norms of the ethnic group – traditional authorities benefit from selling land to the government at inflated prices. The ambiguity of the land tenure regime allows them to allocate land multiple times and to demand rents and tributes. Recognised by the state as legitimate owners, landlords are not incentivised to go through formal channels to secure goods and resources. Instead they use the powerful political resource of indigeneity to secure developments for their own, not the wider, community. Housing is administered as a club good.

**Extra-legal** settlements – neighbourhoods that the government has not authorised and are illegally inhabited – provide young social and political entrepreneurs opportunities to make money, develop a following and amass power. By taking advantage of insecure and informal property rights they can operate “public services” such as shower and toilet businesses, scrap recycling and transport. Extra-legal settlements are

not entirely “off the map” in the way that is often portrayed. Government officials own land and businesses in these communities and residents are often tipped off about imminent evictions. Politicians and state bureaucrats empower local political entrepreneurs by protecting *de facto* landlords in exchange for political support. Housing is administered as a private good. (Ibid. p. 8)

In Awal and Paller’s interpretation, insecure property rights provide the urban poor unique opportunities to start businesses, control housing markets, and govern resources and services. These opportunities are not equally distributed, but depend on local power dynamics. Landlords serve as parental figures in people’s daily lives and can provide security and protection; for example, to young migrants and others in need of work. “Understandings of security of tenure coincide not with the formal housing market and state-sanctioned land access, but with informal norms of legitimacy and authority” (Ibid. p.9).

Urban policies had been pursuing three main objectives: to master demographic growth, to promote policies of employment and social housing, and to meet essential needs with respect to infrastructure and physical equipment (Ibid.). These goals were rarely reached. Not only is urban growth not related to employment creation, but governments have tended to adopt policies of political and economic centralization, as opposed to any promotion of local democracy, participation, or allocation and expression of any economic role whatsoever to local government.

We have to ask ourselves if there exists a policy of urban planning other than the making and the publishing of master plans that never come to pass. What has been the impact of master plans in terms of urban planning when we see, for example, that the squatter areas of Bamako are more heavily populated than the official city? Whether it is added to or combined with this demographic contrast between squatter areas and official city, the exercise of public authority is deployed in a manner that is both unequal and full of contrasts. The police are forbidden from going into some neighborhoods because of the risk involved. Instead, neighborhood militias have emerged, gangs of delinquents and dangerous elements like the area boys in many Nigerian states. The sovereignty of the state is therefore limited to a very precise area, its clients’ territory; in other words, the

country that has seemed to be economically useful, producer of wealth, and the place where “rents” could be obtained. (Ibid. p.105)

Some suggest that the rapid growth of illegal settlements in and around cities could be viewed “not as the growth of slums but, in a very real sense, as the development of cities which are more appropriate to the local culture, climate and conditions than the plans produced by the governments of these same cities” (Hardoy & Satterthwaite, 1989, p. 8). They argue that simply condemning unofficial practices as a result of the lack of effective enforcement or a weak local state fails to see the dynamic inter-relationship between official and unofficial spaces. Naturally, strengthening state enforcement agencies, rooting out corruption and improving systems of registering migrants, would improve the state’s control over the inner city. Nonetheless, they question that the responsibility is not entirely up to the state. There are other social norms values and codes that determine acceptable and reprehensible behavior and these compete alongside the official city (Kihato, 1998):

What does this mean for strengthening relationships between the state and urban dwellers, particularly non-citizens? These sub-economies create instability and fear that negatively impact women’s willingness to see the city as part of their future. Migrant women’s legal status prevents their inclusion and full participation in Johannesburg. Experiences of xenophobic violence and other forms of exclusion, such as the lack of access to bank accounts and economic opportunities, result in the emergence of a transient and ephemeral existence in the city. Women’s business activities are often structured to allow them to make a quick getaway, when under threat.

Kihato, in a gender perspective, contests the assumptions about what motivates urban dwellers that urban governance seems to imply: the certainty and fixity of urban identities, the nature of state power and the unified objectives of the state system. Categories that seem clear in the official dialogue – legal, illegal, official, unofficial – become blurred. The experiences of living ‘in between’ are often invisible to the state and the community, but if deciphered, they have the ability to challenge assumptions about governance and invite us to rethink urban social cate-

gories and relationships, including gender for instance. By looking from the ground up, yet another reality and perspective of the city depicting the complexity of urban relationships.

Much of the informal sector's activities involve finding ingenious workarounds for dysfunctional or inadequate public services. But the informal sector also represents hope – hope for a better life. That's why Accra is so attractive to migrants from rural communities and neighboring countries. "These [young people] are just as rational as you and I," says Dr. George Owusu, a geography professor at the University of Ghana. "They've witnessed how their grandparents have fared. They see how their parents are faring. They want to try something different." (Benzoni, 2013)

The informalization of cities is a key feature of the current moment of global capitalism. Urban informality is not simply a sector of the economy but rather a mode of rule (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004). It structures the relationships between the state and its citizens and establishing the uncertain and negotiable rules through which access to livelihoods, shelter, services and political power are regulated. According to these perspective Ananya Roy's interprets informality not as a discrete sector that exists outside of and beyond state intervention but as a logic that persists at the very heart of the state (Roy, 2009). The state itself, is "informal" and becomes a locus of territorialized flexibility (Roitman, 2004). African urban theorists have given different interpretations of this phenomenon. From Simone's 'pirate towns', to Mbembe and Nuttall's 'experiment and artifice' (2004), through which urban citizens "operate more resourcefully in under resourced cities" (Simone, 2006, p. 357). This framework does not just apply to slums and squatter settlements but also to high-end gated communities.

The 'informal' is usually seen as a sphere of unregulated, illegal or a-legal activity, outside the scope of the state. A domain of survival by the poor and marginalized, passively subject to the tides of gentrification and redevelopment. Nonetheless, in addition to those mentioned before, scientific literature has produced at least three different perspectives through which informality could be interpreted and framed analytically: First, informality lies within the scope of the state rather than outside it. The state defines what is informal and what is not, and sometimes, the state itself operates informally.

For example, the rapid peri-urbanization that is unfolding at the edges of the world's largest cities is an informalized process, often in violation of master plans and state norms but often informally sanctioned by the state. (Roy, 2003)

The relationship between state and citizens, and between formal and informal actors, thus becomes under-codified and under-regulated, dependent on complex processes of alliance making and deal breaking, and particularly resistant to reconfiguring through policy instruments and external interventions (Watson, 2003, p. 39).

The formal sector uses and relies on the informal. As individuals, our lives are usually some combination of both. There's the corporate employee who pays the expected bribes when pulled over, who buys plantain chips in traffic from an informal street vendor. A government worker who drives an illegal motorcycle taxi at night. A retired teacher – a public servant – who now lives in a slum. A worker who participates in an informal savings group that uses a bank's services for the collective. (Benzoni, 2013)

Second, informality is much more than an economic sector; it is a 'mode' of the production of space (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004). The presence of informal areas in the city results in an uneven geography of spatial value, which facilitates the urban logic of primitive accumulation and gentrification. In other words, informality is a fully capitalized domain of property and is often a highly effective 'spatial fix' in the production of value and profits (Roy, 2009). Third, informality is internally differentiated:

The splintering of urbanism does not take place at the fissure between formality and informality but rather, in fractal fashion, within the informalized production of space. With the consolidation of neoliberalism, there has also been a 'privatization of informality'. While informality was once primarily located on public land and practised in public space, it is today a crucial mechanism in wholly privatized and marketized urban formations, as in the informal subdivisions that constitute the peri-urbanization of so many cities. (Ibid. p.826)

In that sense, the high-end, suburban, gated communities are not more "formal" than squatter settlements and shantytowns, aside from the fact that since they are expressions of class power, they have access to bet-

ter infrastructure, services, and most of all, legitimacy. These issues are particularly pressing in many cities in the African continent, but also everywhere else. The features of urbanism that they highlight are part of the urban landscape in Paris like as in Accra: the extralegal territoriality and flexibility of the state; modes of social and discursive regulation; and the production of differentiated spatial value. In this sense, informality is not a pre-capitalist relic or an icon of 'backward' economies. Rather, it is the capitalist mode of production, *par excellence* (Roy, 2009).

#### 4.2.3. Land Rights

The connection with the ground used to be so intimate that until 1908, the courtyards also served as burial grounds. During ceremonies, libation was poured onto the ground, to awake the ancestors and invite them to participate in the ritual. It was only with the advent of the bubonic plague that the colonial government put a stop to this tradition. Until this day, most of the communities in central Accra are still built on the very same grounds, so every proposal to alter the existing structure encounters tremendous resistance since it would essentially alter and disturb the grounds where their ancestors have been buried for the past centuries

Nat Nunoo Amarteifio

##### "Lands Title Registry Stinks"

Intensive investigations conducted by *Daily Guide* have revealed sordid corruption and bribery of unprecedented proportion at the Lands Title Registry of the Ministry of Lands and Forestry.

The registry, currently being headed in acting capacity by the Chief Registrar, Mrs. Rebecca Sittie, is engulfed in a lot of malpractices right from the top to the lower ranks.

Based on allegations flooding the *Daily Guide* office in Accra, the paper went underground to unearth the sordid corrupt practices at the registry.

Lands being disputed by factions are given to the highest giver who can grease the palm of the authorised officer. The present situation that has brought about cash changing hands is as a result of the directive that the Lands Commission should no longer handle the registration of family lands, leaving the Registry to have a field day in terms of registration of family land titles.



The situation at the Registry is such that anxious landlords wanting to have titles to their lands are made to part with money under the guise of seeing some people at the courts as well as purchase indentures for affirmations and swear affidavits before the “Yellow card” to commence work for registration could be issued. The in-depth investigations brought to light the daylight robbery of desperate land owners to sneak their ways in to have their lands titled.

What is currently happening at the Registry is that if a heavy amount of money is collected from a supposed landlord awaiting the registration of his land, though that land could be in dispute and even such land case could be before the court, the highest giver of cash would have the land titled in his name while the defeated landlord of that disputed land is asked to challenge the issue at court.

(Daily Guide, 2008)

In Pre-Colonial times and until the late 19th Century, land ownership in Ghana was practiced differently than in Western countries. The main difference being that the concept of private, individual land ownership did not exist. Instead, land was held by groups or communities. The Ghanaian communal system of land ownership is founded upon a religious view of land, which frames it as a community asset and resource, as opposed to an individual one (Thurman, 2010). The system also associates land with ancestral heritage. In this view, to alienate land absolutely would be to sever the living from the dead ancestors, as land provides the bridge between the two.

The Ghanaian traditional communal land tenure system included several concepts that do not exist in the English common law system of property ownership. The first concept concerns the term allodial title, which refers to a residual title to a community’s land – generally managed by a Chief, head of a family or stool. All other rights related to land are derived from this allodial right, and this right is vested in community ownership. The community finds economic, legal and social expression in this communal right [...] The second concept is known as the usufruct or usufructory interest, also referred to as a customary law freehold interest. The usufructory or customary law freehold interest is an interest or title to land by which a member of a community acquires land by exercising his or her inherent right to develop it. The community holds allodial title in

the land, and the usufructory interest is obtained from the allodial title. A usufruct interest is a recognized estate that can be transferred under customary law, and is potentially perpetual. There are secondary rights associated with the usufructory right, such as rights relating to the utilization of land for the purpose of sustenance. (Agbosu, 2007, p. 86)

During the pre-colonial era in Ghana, land was abundant and there was little competition for land under the customary system. Despite the seemingly ambiguous methods for distinguishing between various communal land ownership interests, the abundance of land, and the communal and religious views of it, resulted in few disputes concerning property ownership (Quarcoopome, 1992). In the late 1800's, new economic activities began to emerge, influencing the value of land in Ghana and setting the stage for disputes and efforts to modify the communal system. Colonial Ghana witnessed many radical changes, including changes to its communal land ownership system. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with the abolition of slavery, Ghana shifted from an economy based on the slave trade to commodities, particularly agricultural produces such as cocoa and wood. This phenomenon, together with the colonization of the Gold Coast, led to the implementation of a new system of land tenure: the English common law system of land ownership, which acted on top of the existing – and still applied – traditional system. The foundation for this system was the provision of notice of property ownership through written documents, which was previously unheard for to the members of the communal system (Agbosu, 2007).

The differences between these two systems were significant. A lack of familiarity with the English system and the manner in which it questioned so many pillars of the communal tenure system created a new sense of insecurity regarding land tenure – one that remains today in a variety of respects. The communal land tenure system lacked boundary definitions that conformed to western interpretations, and the issue of insecure title only grew more serious as a result of boundary disputes and resulting litigation. (Thurman, 2010, p. 11)

Through the use of concessions, (leases of land by a group or community from chiefs) consistent portions of land were – and to some extent still are – acquired by taking advantage of chiefs, many of whom were

illiterate or unfamiliar with the English common law system of property ownership or were seeking personal gain. Nonetheless, increasing consensus steered towards the adoption of English common law. Agbosu (2007) attributes this support to several factors:

First, Ghana was a largely illiterate society at the time, and admiration for literate foreigners helped contribute to the adoption of the English common law property system. Many Ghanaians sought to imitate foreigners and their habits. Second, middle class indigenous people often acted as intermediaries between colonial and indigenous groups as lawyers. Many lawyers were entrepreneurs in their own right and sold and bought concessions themselves. However, in doing so, their interests were aligned with those of foreign entrepreneurs as opposed to the members of the Ghanaian communities that they may have been representing. Third, the commercialization of land was viewed as a necessary means of “civilizing” Ghanaians by emerging local entrepreneurs. (Ibid. p.70)

At the end of the 19th century, a number of attempts at land tenure reform were undertaken to create a system that would resemble Western land tenure systems. The reforms primarily aimed to reduce disputes and facilitate financial investment, but were unsuccessful. Below is an examination of many of the reforms implemented over the years. Yet, three main issues remain about Ghanaian current land regulations. First, the fact that despite all the reforms, this dualist system is still source of disputes and fosters corruption and land-grabbing; Second, very few customary freeholders have recorded rights, which makes them particularly vulnerable in a system that requires time, financial costs, and familiarity with foreign rules; Third, the high costs associated with the system discourage recording from actually taking place, and registration records become outdated and ineffective as a result.

In Ghana, Land ownership can be categorized into two broad classes. Customary land and Public lands. Customary lands are lands owned by stools, skins, families or clan usually held in trust by the chief, head of family, clan, or fetish priests for the benefit of members of that group. Private ownership of land can be acquired by way of a grant, sale, gift or marriage. Public lands are lands, which are vested in the president for public use. Ownership is by way of out-

right purchase from customary landowners or private individuals or headed over from colonial governments. (Sittie, 2006)

Among the more arresting features of contemporary African cities are their skyrocketing property values and opaque urban land markets (Brennan, 2013). Richard Grant (2009) asks, 'How is it that individuals buy property when traditional land law does not permit land sales? How can individuals pay between US\$ 25,000 and \$300,000 for houses when Ghana's [annual] per capita income is around US\$ 400 and mortgages are scarce?'

Urban land speculation and rent-seeking strategies were in place in Accra long before the 1990's era of liberalization. A century earlier, local chiefs had responded to the colonial abrogation of their judicial and taxation powers by becoming urban land brokers. By 1910, they fiercely competed with lineage heads and private individuals 'to establish control or out-right ownership over land', in turn generating 'a kaleidoscope of legal struggles' (Parker, 2000, p. 198).

In colonial Kumasi, commoners, chiefs, and colonial officials alike struggled to control the profitable business of urban land allocation (Berry, 2000). Colonial formalizing of 'customary' urban land principles did little to discourage land commercialization in practice. Indeed, a bustling urban mortgage market had already taken root by the 1930's (Brennan, 2013). Tom McCaskie notes that suburban Kumasi's land boom that followed the Second World War created an anarchic playing field that bedeviled urban planners and enriched rent-seeking speculators:

The housing sector was overtaken by rental sub-lettings on a huge scale as those individuals with clear title to plots sought to optimize their returns. Indeed, rental payments from tenants to landlords living in the same dwelling swiftly became a major source of revenue in Ayigya's booming building economy. (McCaskie, 2001, p. 215)

In Brennan's view, traditional forms of tenure for urban homes in Ghana, were hardly expressions of an anti-capitalist ethos that would secure the 'public good' of universal, family compound-based housing, but rather proved remarkably adaptable to fierce commercial competition over increasingly scarce and valuable land (Lund, 2008). For example, token

payments to traditional authorities, such as customary ‘drink money’ paid to the Asantehene to secure urban plot titles, were reassessed to reflect going market rates (Brennan, 2013). Within this setting, opacity in urban land ownership becomes as an effective and resilient tool for seeking and negotiating rents. Pluralistic land ownership patterns across much of colonial urban Africa represent the overlapping rent-seeking strategies of chiefs, lineages, state authorities (often multiple), and speculative investors (Rakodi, 1997).

Around the world, in both developed and developing countries, policy makers use a variety of tools to manage and accommodate urban growth and redevelopment. Government officials have three main concerns in terms of land policy: accommodating urban expansion, providing infrastructure, and managing density. Together, the planning for infrastructure and urban expansion, land use, and density policies combines to shape the spatial structure of cities. Urban transformation is most efficient when land markets are fluid, particularly when they are grounded in strong institutions that assign and protect property rights, enable independent valuation and public dissemination of land values across uses, and enable the judicial system to handle disputes that may arise in the process (Lozano-Gracia, Lall, Young, & Vishwanath, 2013). When effective, urban planning aligns land use, population and employment density and infrastructure to optimize urban form and economic productivity. Density is in fact a key driver of the demand for urban infrastructure and largely determines the functional efficiency of cities. Land instruments for accommodating growth and financing infrastructure are therefore most useful when placed in the context of an overarching policy framework that helps in sequencing among policies.

At early stages of urbanization, policies that facilitate rural-urban land use conversion will be critical to support urban expansion. Creating strong institutions that facilitate this transformation and help minimize transaction costs and reduce information asymmetries will contribute to enhancing the fluidity of incipient land markets. Clear definition of property rights and valuation will set the basis for well-functioning markets. (Ibid. p.2)

As urbanization advances, population pressures in cities will increase and policies that promote the coordination of land use management and infrastructure development, and manage densification gain importance.

Well-designed policies allow cities to grow vertically with the same parcel of land accommodating higher value economic use, and supporting more people and infrastructure. The challenge here is to allow for rapid substitution between land and capital, where land shortages will be managed through higher levels of capital investment. While the core land institutions mentioned above remain important, city and neighborhood level zoning and building codes gain importance. The next chapter will explore how and whether these principles could be applied to the context of Accra.

## Land Title Registration Process in Ghana

### Step #1

Applicant obtains appropriate registration forms from the Land Title Registry, completes and submits them to the Registry together with copies of all relevant documents and the required registration fees.

### Step #2

Upon submission of application, an applicant is issued with: (i) a receipt of acknowledgment (“yellow card”) and (ii) a letter of request addressed to the Survey Department for the preparation of parcel plans.

### Step#3

Applicant pays for and collects parcel plans from the Survey Department whenever they are ready and submits it to the Land Title Registry to assist in the processing of their application

### Step#4

From the Land Title Registry applicant is issued a photocopy of the parcel plan together with a Request Form to be sent to the Lands Commission for a search report

### Step#5

Upon receipt of the search report by the Land Title Registry, and satisfying itself that there are no objections or adverse findings in the report, the Registry then proceeds to publish the application in the dailies to notify the general public of such application.

### Step#6

Counting from the date of publication, fourteen days’ notice is allowed to receive objections from interested parties who may wish to challenge the application. If no objections are received within the fourteen-day period, the Registry then continues with the process of registration.

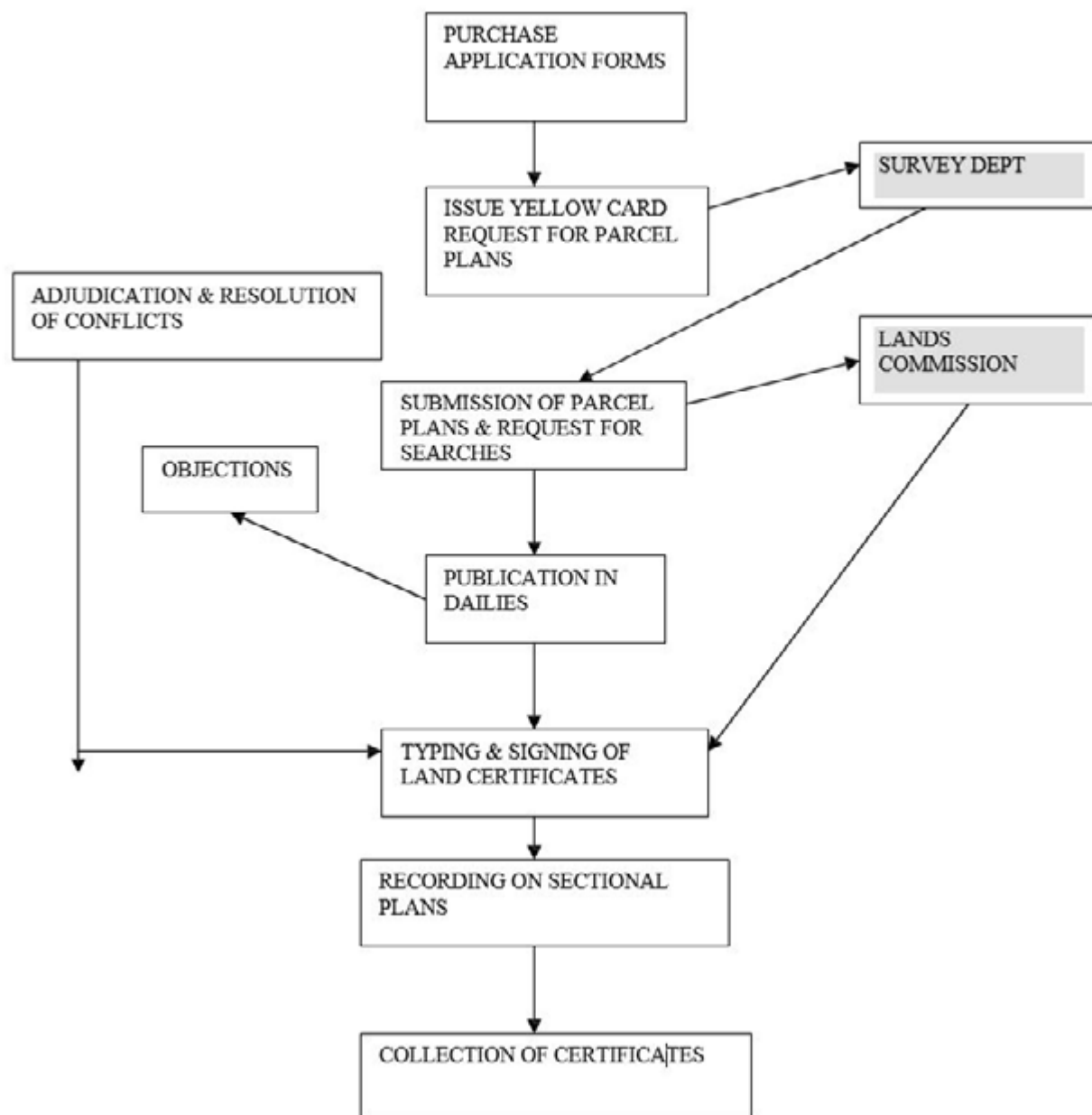
### Step#7

The Land Title Registry prints and sign certificates, records particulars on sectional plan and notify applicants of completion of registration exercise. The Land Title certificates are finally issued out to applicants upon submission of their “yellow cards”

Source: Sittie, R., 2006. *Land Title Registration. The Ghanaian Experience*. Presented at the Shaping the Change, XXIII FIG Congress, Munich.



## PROCESSES INVOLVED IN TITLE REGISTRATION IN GHANA



## SCENE 3.1: LOCAL MARKET









TAM  
#16

## SCENE 3.2: GLOBAL BUSINESS



## 4.3 RESEARCH ISSUES

### 4.3.1. Data

Whether or not Africa's prospering 'cheetah' nations of the 2000s will continue to match optimists' expectations of interconnected economic growth and improved governance over the coming years as they have over the past decade, there is little question that urban centers will be a moving target for urban analysts, who will seek to keep pace through the rapid and experimental adoption of new methodological and analytical frameworks.

(Brennan, 2013, p. 38)

The tack of data in about African urban environments can be associated to the long-term erosion and under-investment in higher education institutions in the postcolonial era. It can also be traced to the institutional reforms that African universities have been subjected to, paralleling neoliberal reforms in the global North, even though to begin with the foundation of these universities were already precarious and under-funded [...] The fact that most African universities are also embedded in multiple asymmetric relationships with Northern universities to serve as extensions for field work and data collection further complicates the picture.

(Pieterse, 2014)

The lack of reliable data about African cities is generally recognized as one of the most disruptive factors in any type of interaction with them, from business to policymaking. In their "scoping exercise" about urban research in developing countries, Patricia Clark Annez and Johannes F. Linn, noted how, among all the literature that they analyzed, "all authors called for improvements in data: data on urban assets, regulatory practices, urban finances, the capacities of urban institutions, or the nature of aid activities" (Annez & Linn, 2010, p. 25). Lack of data and information translates into bad decisions and represents a key issue for governments and private investors, both foreign and local. When it comes to the interpretation of urbanization trends, this lack of reliable data has an enormous impact (Myers, 2011). As Deborah Potts (2012) notes, the fact is that most of the research on the subject utilizes second-hand data and statistics that have been proven fundamentally unreliable.



In November 2010, a perusal of UN-Habitat's "Urban Indicators" database revealed some curious statistics. The proportion of Kenyans living in urban settlements had seemingly reduced from 34% of the total population in 2001 to 22% in 2010. Was it really possible that such a huge number of people had left Kenyan towns for rural areas in the first decade of the 21st century? After all, it is common knowledge that Kenya is urbanising rapidly.

The UN-Habitat data indicated a reduction in the urbanisation level of 11 other mainland countries in sub-Saharan Africa between 2001 and 2010 – Tanzania, Uganda, Benin, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. The declines in Tanzania (from 33% to 26%), Mauritania (59% to 41%), and Senegal (48% to 43%) were as startling as that in Kenya.

Neither the UN-Habitat data nor "common knowledge" accurately represents what has been happening to migration patterns and urban economies in sub-Saharan Africa. The process of urbanisation – whereby an increasing proportion of the population lives in urban settlements – is occurring far more slowly in Africa than is usually reported. This has crucial economic and developmental implications, which cannot be ignored. (Potts, 2012, pp. 1–2)

There is a fundamental issue with the definition of the concept of 'urbanization' – or its lack of – especially as definitions of "urban" vary from country to country. As Potts notes, rapid urban population growth is evident throughout sub-Saharan Africa. However, a burgeoning urban population does not automatically denote a rise in a country's urbanization level. Even if a national population grows at 3.5% a year, doubling in 20 years, urbanization will only occur if the rate of urban population growth has exceeded the rate of national population growth. International organizations like UN-Habitat and the World Bank are the most frequently cited sources of urban population statistics. As Potts argues however,

Their data are often misleading, and have exaggerated urbanisation levels. Most African countries experienced very rapid urbanisation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Thereafter, the conduct of censuses became erratic, and the timely publication of census data less common. Yet population projections made by UN-Habitat and the World Bank as-

sumed that the rate of urbanisation was continuing unabated [...] In time, fictitious figures became facts by being constantly re-stated. (Potts, 2012, p. 2)

Countering this trend, in the late 1990's and 2000's, new censuses were published in sub-Saharan Africa revealing significant divergence in the pace of urbanization. Many countries have been discovered to be urbanizing very slowly with others having de-urbanized. Few have experienced rapid urbanization (Ibid.).

Politicians, civil servants, donors, urban planners, city authorities and academics persisted in using urban population data based on increasingly flawed assumptions about growth rates [...] In time, fictitious figures became facts by being constantly re-stated. Even when census data became available, which provided a corrective action, it could be many years before datasets and projections were amended accordingly. In the late 1990's and 2000's, many new censuses were published in sub-Saharan Africa. These revealed significant divergence in the pace of urbanisation. Many countries are urbanising very slowly. Some have de-urbanised. Very few have been experiencing rapid urbanization. (Potts, 2012, p. 3)

Independently from Potts' conclusions, the fact remains that debate is wide open about the state of urbanization of African cities. This debate has been recently made more inclusive, thanks to the advent of new tools and instruments to measure the growth of cities and their population. Deborah Potts for example refers to an *Africapolis* report (2008) about urbanization trends between 1950 and 2020 in West Africa that utilizes a 'geostatistical approach' that combines satellite imaging with GIS (Geographic Information System) databases the largest collection of documentation on the region. As the authors of the report point out, methodologies used to calculate urban growth have barely progressed since the end of the 1990's and their results are hardly comparable since, in addition to the question of the definition of what is urban and what is not, the tools and methodologies used can differ considerably from one study to another<sup>5</sup> (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008). Consequently, recent

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5 For example, the agglomeration of Touba, the second largest in Senegal with 500,000 inhabitants in an urban area of 103.5 km<sup>2</sup> (or some 5% of the entire country's population in 2008), continues to be classified as "rural" by the country's statistical services (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008, p. 10).

research has been focused on overcoming these hurdles, also thanks to the possibilities deriving from the advent of modern technologies involving satellite mapping and big data analysis. Some studies have begun to address the issue with particular attention to informal settlements, as Sartori, Nembrini and Stauffer's "Monitoring of Urban Growth of Informal Settlements (IS) and Population Estimation from Aerial Photography and Satellite Imaging," Rhinane, Hilali, Berrada and Hakdaoui's "Detecting Slums from SPOT Data in Casablanca Morocco Using an Object Based Approach," Otoo, Whyatt and Ite's "Quantifying Urban Growth in Accra Metropolitan Area (Ama), Ghana and Exploring Causal Mechanisms," and Osei, Balogun and Afrifa's "Identifying and Quantifying Urban Sprawl in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana from 1985 to 2014" all of whom utilize remote sensing and high-resolution satellite imagery to detect and quantify urban growth and demographic density in these areas (Osei, Balogun, & Afrifa, 2015; OTOO, Whyatt, & Ite, 2006; Rhinane, Hilali, Berrada, & Hakdaoui, 2011; Sartori, Nembrini, & Stauffer, 2002).

As in Potts' paper, for the Agence Française de Développement's *Africapolis*, urbanization occurs when the rate of urban population growth exceeds the rate of national population growth. The *Africapolis* research is part of a wider project, called e-Geopolis<sup>6</sup> that analyzes the West African area using a number of innovative techniques based on scientific hypotheses in the field of quantitative geography. Combining satellite imaging with GIS and a database that includes all geographical and historical data from population censuses and official publications (known as "village lists," "census gazetteers," or "village directories" depending on the country). The study starts by putting Africa's supposedly "explosive" growth into context. From their analysis emerges that compared to West Africa, urban growth has in fact been far more explosive in the Arab world, in Latin America, in India, in the rest of Africa, and in South-East Asia. Furthermore, the report stresses how, when we contextualize the term "explosive" with regard to current levels of urbanization across the region, with some 32% of the population living in an agglomeration of more than 10,000 people in 2000, "West Africa remains one of the world's least-urbanized regions along with East Africa and the Indian sub-continent" (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008, p. 6). It also proposes to take into account the relative size of West Africa's major

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6 [www.egeopolis.eu](http://www.egeopolis.eu)

metropolitan areas at the beginning of the 21st century. “In 2005, there were just two agglomerations with more than 3 million inhabitants in the region – Lagos and Abidjan – which, when ranked according to the size of their urban population (following the Geopolis definition), come in 23rd and 83rd position, respectively, on a global scale. With 9.5 million inhabitants, the population of the agglomeration of Lagos is far smaller than that of Manila, Delhi, São Paulo, or Mumbai, all of which have more than 18 million inhabitants, or that of Jakarta, Mexico City, or Seoul, which have more than 20 million inhabitants each, not to mention the mega-cities of the developed world, which, despite very low levels of demographic growth, are still at the top of the global rankings (Tokyo, with 31 million inhabitants, and New York, with 28 million)” (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008, p. 6). Another issue derives from the fact that traditionally, publications list only cities over 500,000, 750,000, or even 1 million inhabitants, while even the most detailed cover only cities with 100,000 inhabitants or more. There are only 104 agglomerations with more than 100,000 inhabitants in West Africa, which means that 90% of the cities of the region are not included in any database. Therefore there is no information about the growth of medium-sized or small towns, which actually represent the very key to future urban development (Cohen, 2006). The bulk of urban population growth will take place in far smaller cities and towns: “large cities will play a significant role in absorbing future anticipated growth, but for the foreseeable future the majority of urban residents will still reside in much smaller urban settlements of fewer than 500,000 residents” (Cohen, 2006, p. 73). This is relevant for a number of reasons: first, as discussed above, when combined, the total population of smaller cities and towns is demographically very significant. Second, because by definition they are starting from a smaller base, small cities typically grow faster than large cities. Third, according to a recent study of urban infrastructure, residents of small cities in developing countries are extensively underserved with respect to basic services. Furthermore, evidence suggests that rates of poverty are higher in smaller cities and in many countries, levels of infant and child mortality are negatively proportional to city size. Finally, local government capacity is weaker in smaller cities and therefore deserve greater attention to assist them in the management of their future urban development (Cohen, 2006).

## Seven Stages Methodology

The standardized method for defining urban areas (the agglomerations) combines two different sources: statistical population data for each country and detailed images and geo-referenced maps, clearly showing the agglomerations' geographical boundaries utilized in the *Africapolis* study (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008, p. 25).

### 1. Population localization

Juridical limits of the local units. This stage makes use of statistics published by national statistical offices (population censuses, population counts, and official birth records). When this data is not available as a map, the centroids are used as a mapping tool. A centroid is a point that represents the barycenter or center of a local community, such as a city hall, church, or major mosque.

### 2. Accessing satellite images or topographical maps

Most images can be downloaded from websites such as Google Earth (GE). However, there are many other complementary sources that can be particularly useful when the resolution of the image is of poor quality.

### 3. Polygons representing built-up areas considered as urban

In this case, the polygon shape files are superimposed on a map showing administrative boundaries.

### 4. Creating buffer zones of 100 meters

Buffer zones of 100 meters allow the extent of built-up areas to be assessed using the definition based on a figure of less than 200 meters between constituent buildings.

### 5. Merging blocks

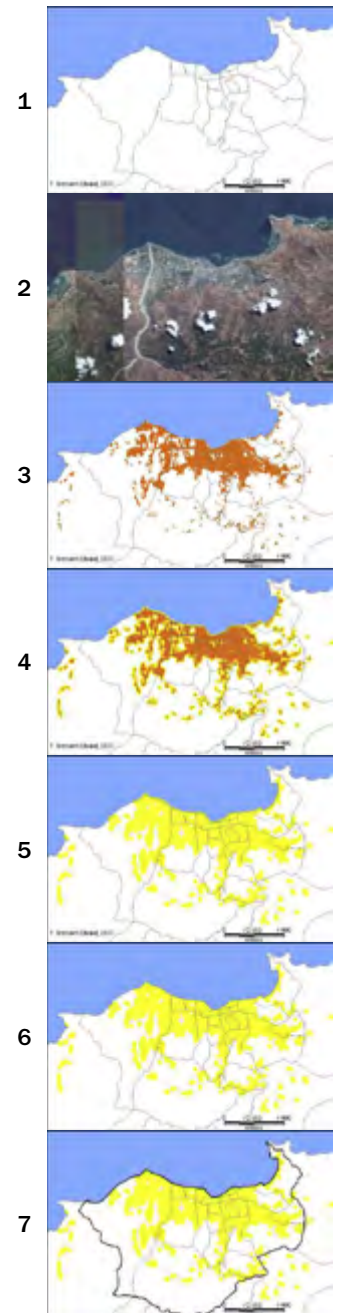
This removes any overlaps and creates contiguous zones of less than 2,500 meters.

### 6. Cleaning up

The edges of the blocks are cleaned up to match the oecumene's boundaries (the area that is actually inhabited).

### 7. Statistical adjustment

The contours of the agglomeration are matched to local administrative units. At least 50% of the unit's built-up areas must be part of the main agglomeration. The resulting agglomeration therefore covers a number of different administrative units – municipalities, cities, villages, etc. In some cases, parts of specific administrative units located on the margins of surrounding units are included in the agglomeration while others are not – for example, to the east of the agglomeration shown on this map. The margin of error created by this adjustment is minor for large agglomerations, but it can be more significant for smaller ones, especially those with a population of around 10,000 inhabitants.



In conclusion, the projections made by the Africapolis project are markedly lower than those presented by other sources, but they do not deny them tout-court. Urbanization rates in West Africa, according to Africapolis, should reach 33.6% in 2010 and 34.6% in 2020, compared to 44.6% and 50.5%, respectively, according to UN/ESA<sup>7</sup>. It is also important to note that when looking at the broader global picture, the modest increase in the urbanization rate predicted by the study by no means implies weak urban growth. In fact, according to the Geopolis definition of urban agglomeration, 481 new agglomerations will cross the threshold of urban between 2000 and 2020. By then, West Africa will have as many agglomerations as North America. In 2020, the urban population of the 16 countries of the region will thus reach 124 million inhabitants, compared to 74 million in 2000. Thus 50 million additional urbanites are expected, a number equivalent to the entire urban population of West Africa in 1990. In 20 years, the urban population increase alone will be comparable to the level of urban population reached in 1990, following several centuries of growth. Although the urban population growth rate is slowing, this is offset by the increase in urban population, which is estimated to be around 2.5 million people per year. Even if the projections based on the Africapolis database provides lower urbanization rates than those generated by the UN database, it does not follow that urban growth in Africa will be weak. On the contrary, its rate will remain one of the strongest, perhaps the strongest growth rate in the world. West Africa surpasses its own historical record every day in the number of agglomerations as well as its urban population stocks. Similarly, every day, the size of large agglomerations radically alters the urban dimension of local societies in terms of demographic scale and agglomeration's footprint.

According to the results of the study, the main challenge of future urbanization is not to manage its growth rates but rather to encourage the sustainable development of intermediate cities between large metropolitan areas and small agglomerations. They present the real bulk of future urbanization and at the same time still offer the possibility to prepare and plan their future development within a realistic timeframe. Modern technologies can be of great help in this task, and the academia and scholars – both foreign and local – could provide essential research and studies, if given the opportunity.



Ultimately, as it emerges from the analysis of these narratives, everyone seems to agree that now it is the turn of African leaders to act, because there are no commodities or urbanization rates that can substitute responsible governance, whether this means providing sufficient funds for basic infrastructure and healthcare or higher education and inter-continental research platforms, the future of these cities is in the hands of those who govern them (Marshall, 2012). For all its commodities and demographic growth, African cities, and their administrators will still have to be able to reap their potential. As Jane Jacobs' *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* recites: "wealth is not merely a matter of assets, but rather the capacity to engage those assets in production, and to adapt to changing circumstances and needs" (Jacobs, 1985).

#### 4.3.2. Theory

Many studies of globalization and cities have drawn on the idea of "world" cities to understand the role of cities in the wider networks and circulations associated with globalization. Some cities outside the usual purview of Western urban theory – "Third World Cities" – have been incorporated into these studies in so far as they are involved in those globalizing processes considered relevant to the definition of world cities. This is definitely a positive development in terms of ambitions to post-colonialize urban studies, to overcome the entrenched divisions between studies of "Western" and "Third World" cities. But many around the world remain "off the map" of this version of urban theory. (Robinson, 2006, p. 93)

Despite the relative inclusiveness of the focus on globalization processes, developmentalism continues to pervade the global – and world city – narratives, consigning poorer cities to a different theoretical world dominated by the concerns of development[...]World cities approaches, by placing cities in hierarchical relation to one another, implicitly establish some cities as exemplars and others as imitators. In policy-related versions of these accounts cities either off the world-cities map or low down the supposed hierarchy have an implicit injunction to become more like those at the top of the hierarchy of cities [instead] [...]all cities should be viewed as ordinary, both distinctive and part of an interconnected world of cities. (Robinson, 2006, p. 94)

Much of the theoretical work on city-regions is firmly located in the urban experience of North America and Western Europe. This is not unusual. It is part of a canonical tradition where theory is produced in the crucible of a few 'great' cities: Chicago, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles – cities inevitably located in EuroAmerica. It is time to rethink the list of 'great' cities. (Roy, 2009, p. 820)

Most contemporary African urban studies' scholars tend to adhere to her idea, as it contributes to the theoretical progress towards a more open and non-prejudiced approach to the subject (De Boeck & Plissart, 2014; Myers, 2011; Pieterse & Simone, 2013). Hierarchization and an overly Western-centric approach in the analysis of the cities of the world are at the center of Jennifer Robinson's call for a "postcolonisation" of urban studies through a deconstruction of the category of the Third-World city.

In such a world, Vancouver and San Francisco are the peripheral outposts of a dynamic Pacific Rim urbanism centred in the para-site, Hong Kong, and extending to Beijing and Shanghai with labour and outsourcing hinterlands in the Philippines, Cambodia, Chinese economic zones, and Vietnam. In such a world, Dubai is the lodestone of desires and aspirations, the icon of supermodernity in the back-breaking trudge of transnational migration from the villages of Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan. It is surely an 'evil paradise' of 'fear and money', a 'dreamworld of neo-liberalism' (Davis, 2006), but it is also an articulation of an Arab modernity where more is at stake than what Davis (2006, p. 53) designates as the 'monstrous caricature of futurism'. It is the place at which the distinctions between the black economy and global finance capital are erased, where city and nature are violently fused, and where the feudalism of an emirate meets up with an open cosmopolitanism. (Roy, 2009, p. 828)

In her view, the Third-World city category perpetuates a "neo-colonialist" and capitalist way of thinking implying that there are Western cities on the one hand, around which urban theory was forged, and Third-World cities on the other, whose degree of development can only be measured only in terms of the former (Robinson, 2006). This reconceptualization has been well received by African urban studies scholars like Pieterse, Murray and Myers, who agree with the necessity to articulate

a vision for cities that expands beyond the African continent and the categories of “developing” and “Third World” cities (Murray & Myers, 2006; Myers, 2011; Pieterse & Simone, 2013). Comparing Robinson’s definition of ordinary city with Sassen’s global city, the differences are less dramatic than expected as both take their distance from the previous “world city” concept.

Global economy is unpacked into a variety of highly-specialized cross-borders circuits, corresponding to specific industries that operate cross-borders. These networks may run through distinct sets of global cities. (Sassen, 2001, p. 347)

The real shift is in the emphasis on the different layers of networks that take place in the city, the uniqueness of every city, and the value of this uniqueness (Robinson, 2006, p. 109). As it was mentioned before, Sassen later included both of these aspects in her theory, but never really explored them in detail; focusing rather on the activities of multinational corporations and the biggest manifestations of the world economy (Sassen, 2001, p. 347). Ultimately, the goal of the ordinary city reconceptualization is to offer a framework to bring together a vast array of network and circulations of varying spatial reach and assemble many different kinds of social, economic and political processes. In Robinson’s words, “ordinary cities are diverse, complex and internally differentiated” (Robinson, 2006, p. 109). The hierarchization and subdivision of the cities of the world into different classes relegates most African cities into a category of their own, approached only through the lenses of emergency and developmentalism.

#### **4.3.3. Knowledge Production**

In our reading of the times, and the truncated futures of African cities in particular, it seems self-evident that we must take responsibility for elaborating alternative forms of well-being that can be attained through systemic urban change. (Pieterse, 2014, p. 6)

If we assume that cities are reproduced and contested through a multiplicity of agonistic confrontations that can in turn produce questions and decisions about how diverse actors position themselves and act in light of periodic clash-

es, the role of knowledge producers can simultaneously be a reflective mirror, critic, advisor and partner-in-learning. (Pieterse & Simone, 2013, p. 20)

It is not enough simply to study the cities of the global South as interesting, anomalous, different, and esoteric empirical cases. Such forms of benign difference making keep alive the neo-orientalist tendencies that interpret Third World cities as the heart of darkness, the Other. It is argued that the centre of theory-making must move to the global South; that there has to be a recalibration of the geographies of authoritative knowledge. As the parochial experience of EuroAmerican cities has been found to be a useful theoretical model for all cities, so perhaps the distinctive experiences of the cities of the global South can generate productive and provocative theoretical frameworks for all cities. (Roy, 2009, p. 820)

The westernization of the African narratives about its economic development or urban environment has its roots in the EuroAmerican-centric point of view from which they are usually elaborated (Roy, 2009, p. 820). As Roy proposes, it is time to articulate new geographies of urban theory, and doing so requires ‘dislocating’ the EuroAmerican center of theoretical production. Some scholars, like Myers, Pieterse and Robinson, agree in this argument to rethink the geographies of urban and regional theory, since the imbalance between the amount of research about North American and Western European cities has led the discourse to adopt a very much Western-centric perspective (Brill, 2015), which in turn has demonstrated to be unfit to study cities from other parts of the world (Robinson, 2006). The cities of the global South, when visible in urban theory, are usually assembled under the sign of underdevelopment, that last and compulsory chapter on ‘Third World Urbanization’ in the urban studies textbook (Roy, 2009). They are the sites at which capital accumulation and democratic governance happen under ‘special circumstances’ (Stren, 2001, p. 205). They are the mega-cities, bursting at the seams, overtaken by their own fate of poverty, disease, violence, and toxicity. They constitute the ‘planet of slums’, with its ‘surplus humanity’ and ‘twilight struggles’ (Davis, 2004, p. 13). It is necessary to go beyond, this “broken,” Western-centric models through which African cities have been until recently addressed and theorized (Myers, 2011).

The concern is with the limited sites at which theoretical production is currently theorized and with the failure of imagination and epistemology that is thus engendered. It is time to blast open theoretical geographies, to produce a new set of concepts in the crucible of a new repertoire of cities. (Roy, 2009, p. 820)

A wide variety of actors and institutions contribute to the production of information about African cities, operating at different scales, with different methodologies and with different goals. Nonetheless, a recurring trait among them is that they seldom originate from the continent itself, as the North American and European presence in the geographies of knowledge production about the continent still seems to dominate the academic and cultural landscape.

As a number of recent studies confirm, the EuroAmerican-centricity of theoretical production about African cities is very much rooted in reality (van der Merwe, 2004). Both the works of Samuel Laryea and Roine Leiringer's, based on the materials from the Waber (West African Built Construction Environment Research) conference and the Convo-co! Foundation in cooperation with Oxford Internet Institute's report seem to confirm this trend (Graham, Hale, & Stephens, 2011; Laryea & Leiringer, 2012). Laryea and Leiringer's study focuses on the West African region. There are at least 336 universities in West Africa for a total population of 320.6 million people. The University of Monrovia, which opened as Liberia College in 1862, is the oldest degree-awarding institution in West Africa, and Ahmadu Bello University based in Zaria, Nigeria is the largest university in Sub-Saharan Africa. The universities in West Africa offer a wide range of degree programmes in the arts, education, engineering, medicine, social sciences, law, physical sciences, built environment, etc. Nonetheless, less than 50 percent of the universities in West Africa are public universities funded by the state. The majority of universities are private-owned institutions, most of which have to be affiliated with more established universities while they undergo the process of transforming into full-fledged autonomous universities. If we only take into account built environment teaching such as architecture, building, engineering, estate management, planning, and quantity surveying, 75% of the universities are either in Ghana or Nigeria.

Country	Population (million)	Year of Inde- pendence	Official language	Number of universities
Benin	9	1960	French	3
Burkina Faso	16	1960	French	1
Cameroon	19	1960 (France)	French and	13
		1961 (Britain)	English	
Cape Verde	0.5	1975	Portu- guese	10
Cote d'Ivoire	21	1960	French	6
Gambia	2	1965	English	1
Ghana	24	1957	English	59
Guinea	10	1958	French	6
Guinea-Bissau	1.6	1973	Portu- guese	4
Liberia	4	1847	English	9
Mali	15	1960	French	10
Mauritania	3.5	1960	Arabic	9
Niger	15.5	1960	French	1
Nigeria	152	1960	English	195
Senegal	14	1960	French	6
Sierra Leone	6.5	1961	English	2
Togo	7	1960	French	1
Total	320.6			336

Universities in West African countries. Source: (Laryea, Leiringer, & Hughes, 2011)

The study draws on a sample of 189 papers presented at the WABER conferences 2009 and 2011, 77 of which fall within the topic of physical infrastructure and environment and 59 deal with Economics and construction industry development. From their study of these papers, the authors found four main trends: 1) the two most common problem areas are 'Physical infrastructure and environment' and 'Economics and construction industry development', as 70% of the published papers deal with issues within these two domains; 2) In more than 2/3s of the papers the problem formulation is given at a national level. Very few papers take a local, regional or international perspective; 3) There is a stark overrepresentation of survey studies relying on questionnaires for



data collection. There are four times as many papers using surveys as there are of any other research method; 4) In a significant number of cases the chosen research method is not suitable for the problem under investigation.

From their study, Laryea and Leiringer conclude that there is a need to reassess how research problems can be formulated and look at what appropriate research methods can be used, so that knowledge can be created and distributed, thus providing a foundation for a more long term impact. They advocate for “moving from surveying ‘perceptions’ to surveying ‘actions’” and of how “a more thorough engagement with the literature/theory would allow for the surveys to be based on clearly stated theoretical propositions” (Laryea & Leiringer, 2012, p. 803).

The aim is for the research to be rigorous both methodologically and theoretically and centred on issues that are of focal concern to a wide range of stakeholders. This can help to improve built environment research output, which should ultimately help to develop relevant knowledge and technologies for advancing socio-economic development in a region that is currently pushing for rapid economic growth and better quality of life for its population. (Laryea & Leiringer, 2012, p. 803)

Governments in West Africa realize the need for strong built environment academic research institutions, but there are several factors that impede on their capacity to fulfil this mandate. Funding, but also emigration of students and skilled professionals from Sub-Saharan Africa to developed countries since the early 1980s. Some of these individuals do return, but the intermediate effects of this ‘brain drain’ should not be underestimated. For example, it is worth noting the “paucity of articles written by authors with affiliations in the region in the main construction management journals, compared to the output of West African academics based overseas” (Laryea & Leiringer, 2012, p. 799). The research shows how, of a review of the six most influential journals in construction management over the period comprised between 1985 and 2011, only 23 publications are from West Africa (by 28 authors from 13 different West African universities). Many students go abroad in search of education and many West African researchers are active across the world

(some with exceptional records of accomplishment) but there remains a fundamental need to build up research and student capacity within countries in the West African region.

Similar data emerge from the study by the Convoco! Foundation in cooperation with Oxford Internet Institute (Graham et al., 2011). This unbalance extends well beyond traditional media and into scientific publications, of which only 35 out of the 9500 that were sampled are based in the African continent. Also, Pieterse and Tavengwa point out how only 60 academic publishers are Africans, and that they are concentrated in South Africa and Nigeria (Pieterse & Simone, 2013). They show how

The power relations that these findings reflect are of course outrageous, but in truth not really much of a surprise for anyone involved in academia or broader knowledge production [...] If we are to recalibrate the geographies of authoritative knowledge, it is clearly not enough to simply produce new knowledge from the global South. We also need to think about the vehicles for knowledge production and dissemination. (Ibidem. P. 455)

Indeed, this is a very pressing issue, which has its origins in the very structure of the international system of evaluation of academic publications and its impact factor-based rankings.

In his paper “Epistemological Practices of Southern Urbanism,” Edgar Pieterse explains how the purpose of the establishment of the African Center for Cities, was defined around producing knowledge that could enable key urban actors to act with greater clarity of intent and self-awareness about the consequences of their actions: “we were as founders simultaneously steeped in key tenets of postcolonial urbanism and political ecology, both of which foreground the capillary dynamics of neoliberal Governmentalities [...] We decided to figure out how states, as one key urban actor, could be engaged purposively so that meaningful knowledge can be produced to inform and critique the imperative “to act” (Pieterse, 2014, p. 5). This bias was adopted despite the deep theoretical skepticism about the capacity and willingness of contemporary (local) states to act in any progressive way, and more importantly to rather act in exclusionary and oppressive ways” (Ibidem 2014).

#### Academic Knowledge and Publishers

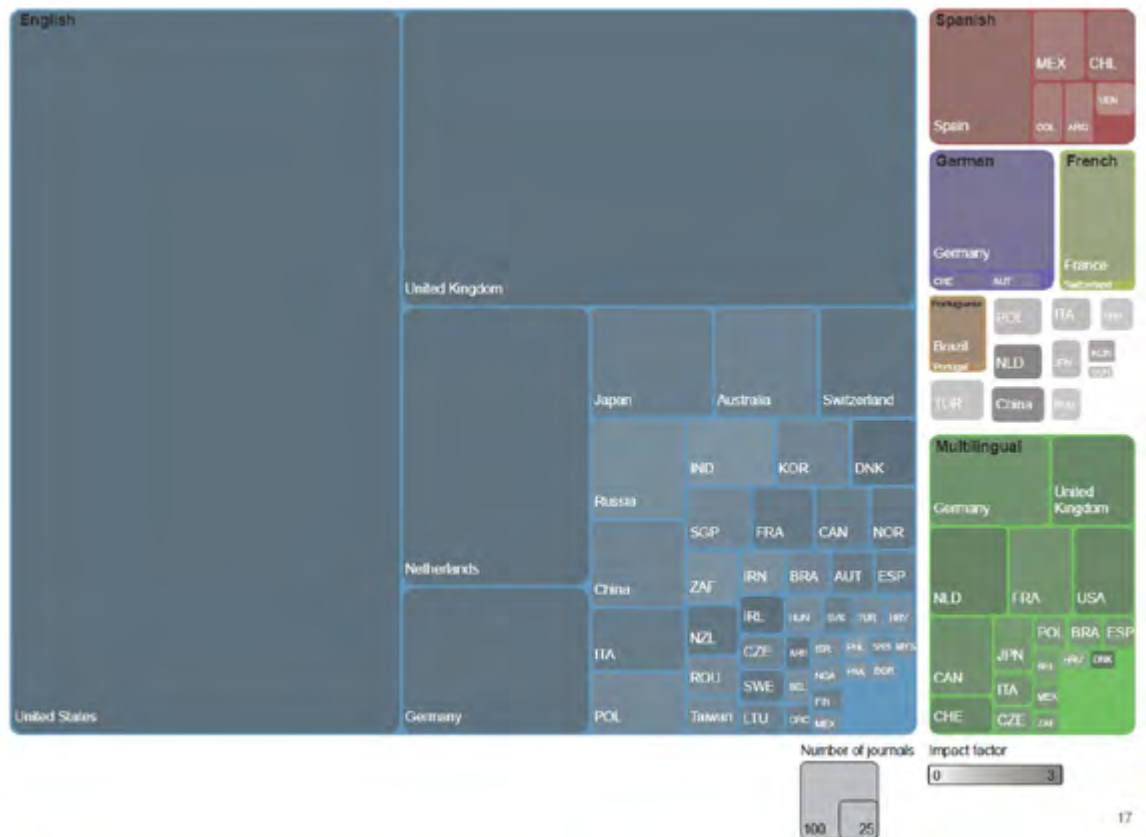
This series of graphics depicts the control of academic journals in the Web of Knowledge index by publishers. Mapping academic publishers allows us to understand the geography of who controls the printing and dissemination of academic knowledge.

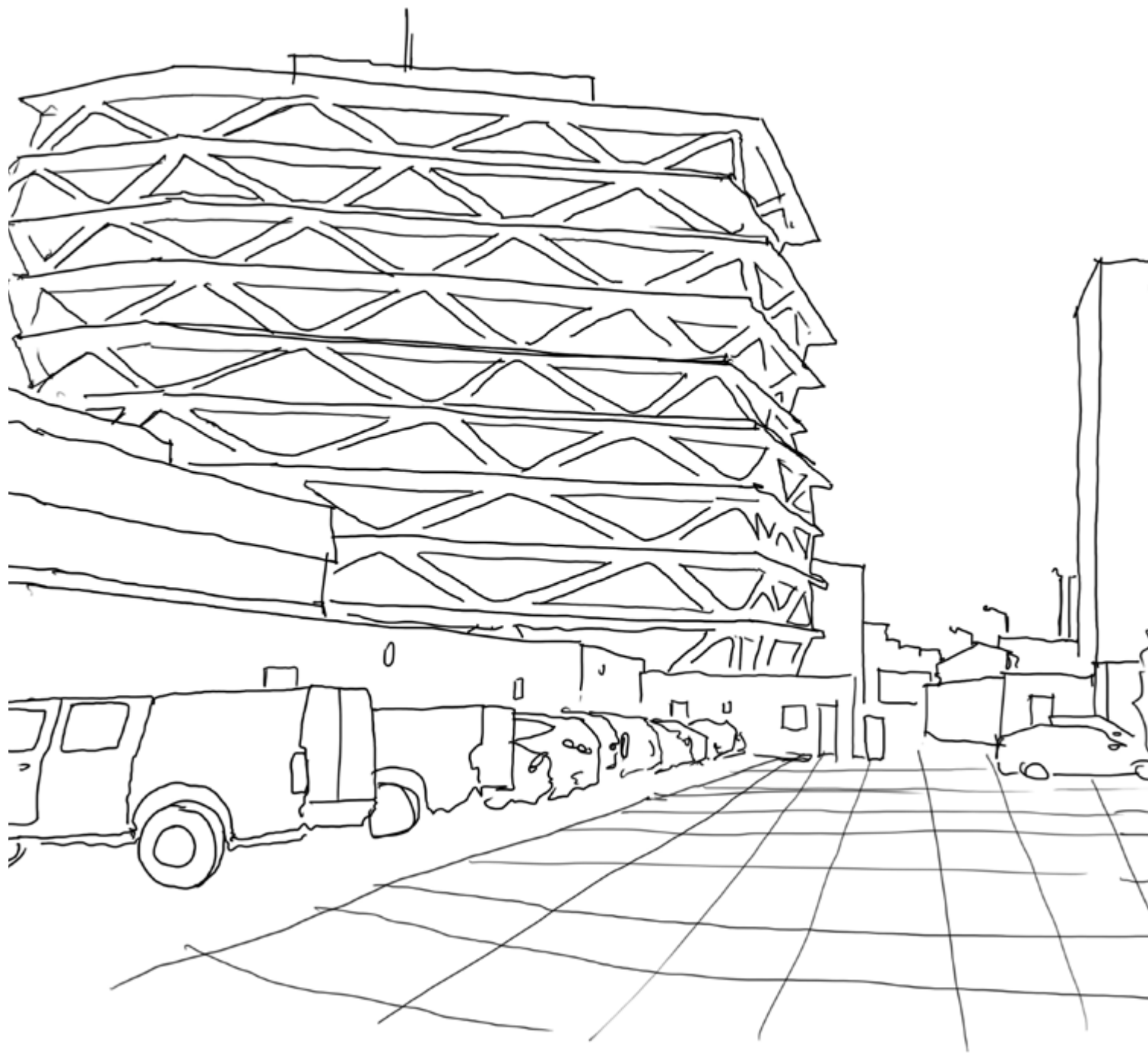
This visualisation uses data from the Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports (JCR) from 2009. Two types of visualisations are paired together on this graphic. The choropleth maps illustrate the number of publishers in each country with darker colours indicating more publishers. The treemaps indicate the number of journals published by each publisher. This graphic is segmented into three categories: publishers of science journals, publishers of social science journals and publishers of both.

Despite the absence of linguistic and geographic diversity in academic publishing, there remains a surprising lack of concentration amongst journal publishers. Within the groups of publishers that focus only on journals in the sciences or social sciences, the publication of journals is distributed through many organisations and companies. The larger group of publishers that control both science and social science journals, on the other hand, are characterised by a greater degree of clustering (i.e. fewer organisations controlling relatively large numbers of journals). Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Elsevier and Taylor & Francis control a large amount of the academic publishing market and all have relatively high average citations scores.

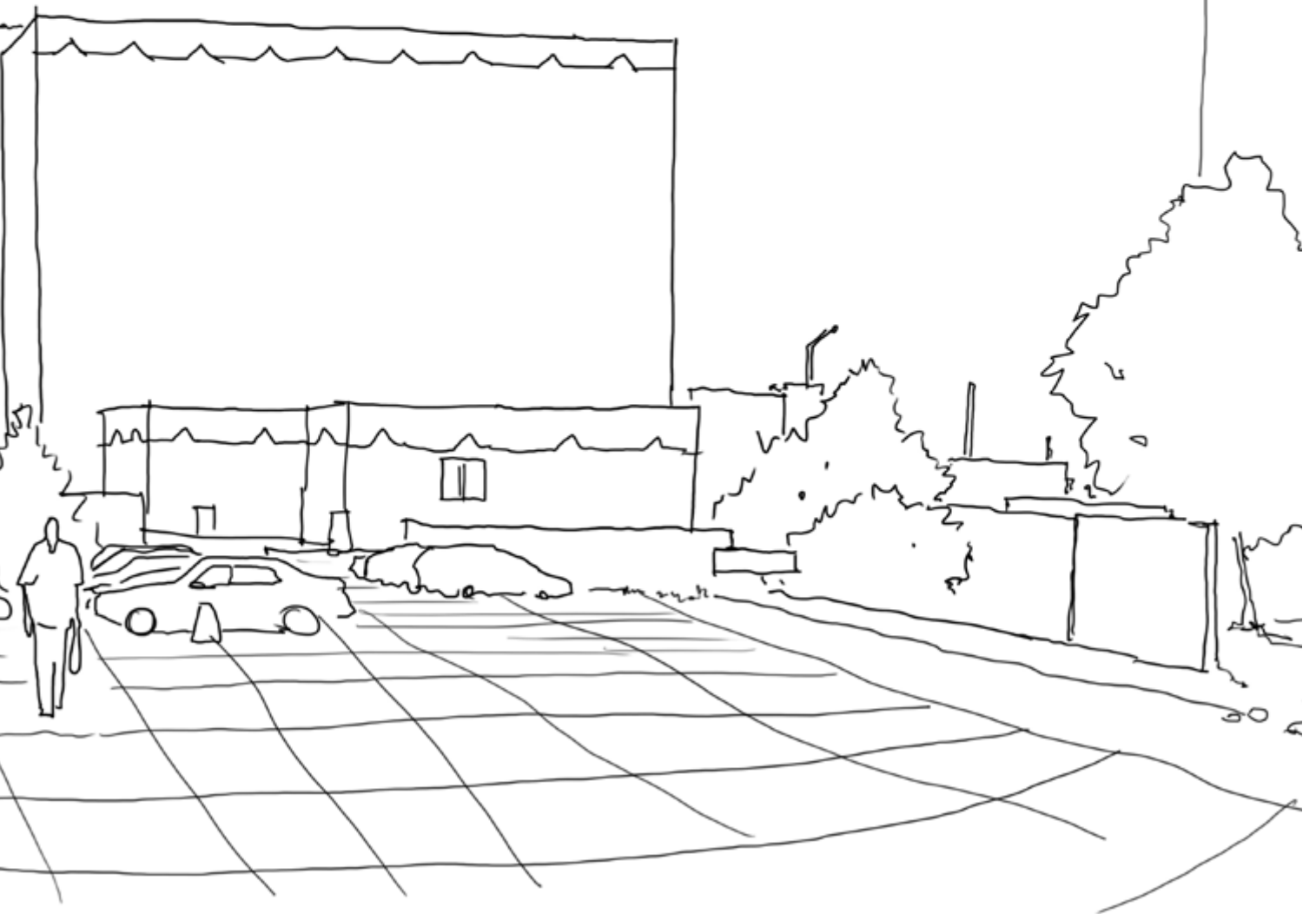
Graham, M., Hale, S., & Stephens, M. (2011). *Geographies of the World's Knowledge*. Convoco! Edition.

As Simone suggests, it is time to think about how African cities can be understood not as failed cities, but rather as cities of aspirations and expectations, what he calls, “the city yet to come” (Simone, 2004). In order to do so, it is fundamental to recognize the “African city” label as the generalization that it is, grouping together an extremely heterogeneous mix of urban realities, which can present great differences even between neighboring states: Ouagadougou is very different from Accra, which is very different from Abidjan, which is very different from Lagos. This, despite the fact that they are all located in West Africa. Putting in the same basket Francophone, Anglophone, West African, Central African and East African cities inevitably leads to confusion. Furthermore, it is commonly implied when talking about “African cities,” that the area of consideration is actually only the Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding therefore the entire northern part of the continent.





# CONCLUSION







To conclude the research, the issues that emerged from the analysis are addressed according to the phronetic research approach' last question: What, if anything, should we do about it?

The answers are intentionally kept simple. Each of the issues that were analyzed could be the subject of extensive research in itself, this is why this research gives broad answers, while providing specific references to address each of the issues separately. The conclusion to this research is that ultimately, the problems that emerged from it have been part of the development of any city in the world at some point in history. The point nowadays is that the scale of change is much greater, and therefore a sustainable urban development in cities like Accra has the potential to improve the lives of millions or, on the other hand, compromise their future irreparably. This research chooses to start from the small scale, because it is through the individual contribution of people like those who have been interviewed that this change can happen. Therefore, it does not address only scholars and academics, but also practitioners across the different fields that revolve around the world of urban development. Hence, its inclination towards practical issues, and the tendency to keep the solutions to these issues as 'simple' as possible.

## 5.1 'SO WHAT' ISSUES

The development of social research is inhibited by the fact that researchers tend to work with problems in which the answer to the question: 'If you are wrong about this, who will notice?' is all too often: 'Nobody.' Bailey calls the outcome of such research "so what" results.' Phronetic planning researchers seek to transcend this problem of relevance by anchoring their research in the context studied.

(Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 14)

### Architecture Issues

Contemporary architecture is a global profession. But the challenges to practice in a foreign environment are many. From interpreting the client taste, to solving technological problems that might be due to the local lack of materials or expertise. Wickersham (2007) and Adam (2008, 2012) provide useful reference in addressing these issues. Nonetheless, the solution to this problem, as a few of the interviewees suggest, might be to simply 'be there'. Physical presence and personal experience in the context, interacting with local clients, practitioners and workers seems to be the ultimate and only solution to provide good, locally conscious, and ultimately, sustainable, architecture design. The ability of the architect should be to be able to efficiently interpret the local client's needs and, especially, taste, to combine them with sustainable materials and energy-efficient strategies.

About sustainability, what emerges from this research is that it should emerge from the specificities of the context, drawing on the physical and thermal properties of local materials. In a context with such great infrastructural issues linked to the supply of electricity, building technologies should be kept as passive as possible, avoiding complex solutions that would need to be imported from abroad. In addition to this, the environmental footprint of building materials should be taken into account, since sustainability is not just about the energy bill, but also linked to the environmental impact of the supply of construction materials. About this topic, the monographies about Tropical Architecture by Fry, Drew and Koenigsberger (Fry & Drew, 1956, 1964; Koenigsberger, 1974) remain fundamental to this day. For further reading about the

#### Previous page

James Cubitt, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Development Office, Stadium, Kumasi (Ghana), 1964-1967. Source: Alexia Webster

need to “disincentivize environmental harm” and technological and design solutions to working with limited resources today, see *The Economy of Sustainable Construction* and *Reinventing Construction* (2014; 2010).

## Urban Issues

In Accra, the lack of vision, coordination and execution in the field of urban planning is leading to the decay of its architectural heritage and serious infrastructural issues. For an overview of Accra’s urban governance dynamics Awal and Paller (2016) provide an excellent overview of the issues at hand. From an analysis of the literature and the fieldwork informality emerges as such an established and (unofficially) regulated part of the urban environment that its inclusion within the “official” discourse about planning seems inevitable. Yet, it is still struggling to be recognized and acknowledged in its criticality, but also potential for development (The World Bank, 2015).

Planning in Accra needs to recognize the values that its urban environment already incorporates and establish a long-term vision for the city. This vision must take informal urban areas and dynamics into account as legitimate actors. In order to execute its vision, the local government must resolve the land issues that plague its system since its inception. For a specific take on how these issues are to be addressed in Accra see Rebecca Sittie, *Land Title Registration. The Ghanaian Experience* (2006), Thurman (Thurman, 2010), Awal and Paller (2016), The World Bank (2015). Ultimately, as Watson and Agbola note, planning must start from education, to ensure that future urban practitioners will be equipped to respond effectively and meaningfully to urbanization in Africa. The gap between what planning students were taught and the urban realities they confronted after graduation needs to be reduced (Watson & Agbola, 2013).

## Research Issues

Contemporary urban research carries great responsibility. It has the potential to influence the development of the future urban environment across the world, particularly in the areas that will be growing the most. Africa certainly classifies among them, and has already shown the creative potential, but also the criticalities that such development can im-

ply, if not well-regulated. The first problem about urban research in Africa is that it needs to be specific, but not isolated. It is not particularly useful to address “African cities” as a category, but at the same time, specific research about cities in Africa must be framed within a global and de-hierarchized theoretical framework such as that provided by Robinson (2002, 2006, 2008) in the form of ‘ordinary cities.’ Accurate data must be gathered about these cities, and nowadays modern technologies have demonstrated that it is a possible endeavor (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2008; OTOO, Whyatt, & Ite, 2006; Rhinane, Hilali, Berrada, & Hakdaoui, 2011; Sartori, Nembrini, & Stauffer, 2002). The geographies of knowledge production about this research should also be considered, activating new knowledge and academic networks to span North-South and East-West across the globe. Furthermore, a certain degree of instrumentality should anchor research. In order for this action to become functional towards its goal, it must establish solid relationship with the institutional actors that regulate urban development. Pieterse (2014) defines the places for this interaction as what he defines as “bespoke laboratories” that would allow practitioners (from the state and civil society organizations) to collaborate with academic researchers to address the most urgent urban questions. These laboratories should act as interdisciplinary spaces devoted to the analysis and contemplation of the city through both academic and popular engagement. Furthermore, interaction between academic actors and institutions should ideally take place at three different scales: the regional, national and continental. The role of regional observatories is to “systematize the collection of data and various representations of urban patterns and trends. These independent institutions should ideally straddle various universities and numerous public bodies with a vested interest in improving the accuracy of the data sets that inform planning, budgeting, monitoring and comparison” (Ibid. p.20). They should operate as a public resource and exploit their expertise and localized knowledge to promote meaningful debate about their context. All the while remaining in close contact with the other laboratories in order to elaborate common practices and standards in their research and data collection. At the national scale, government’s departments should unlock national resources to promote independent academic research, establishing international connections that would allow them to become part of extended networks of expertise and knowledge. Something similar should happen at a continental scale,

#### **Right**

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), College of Architecture and Planning, 2013.

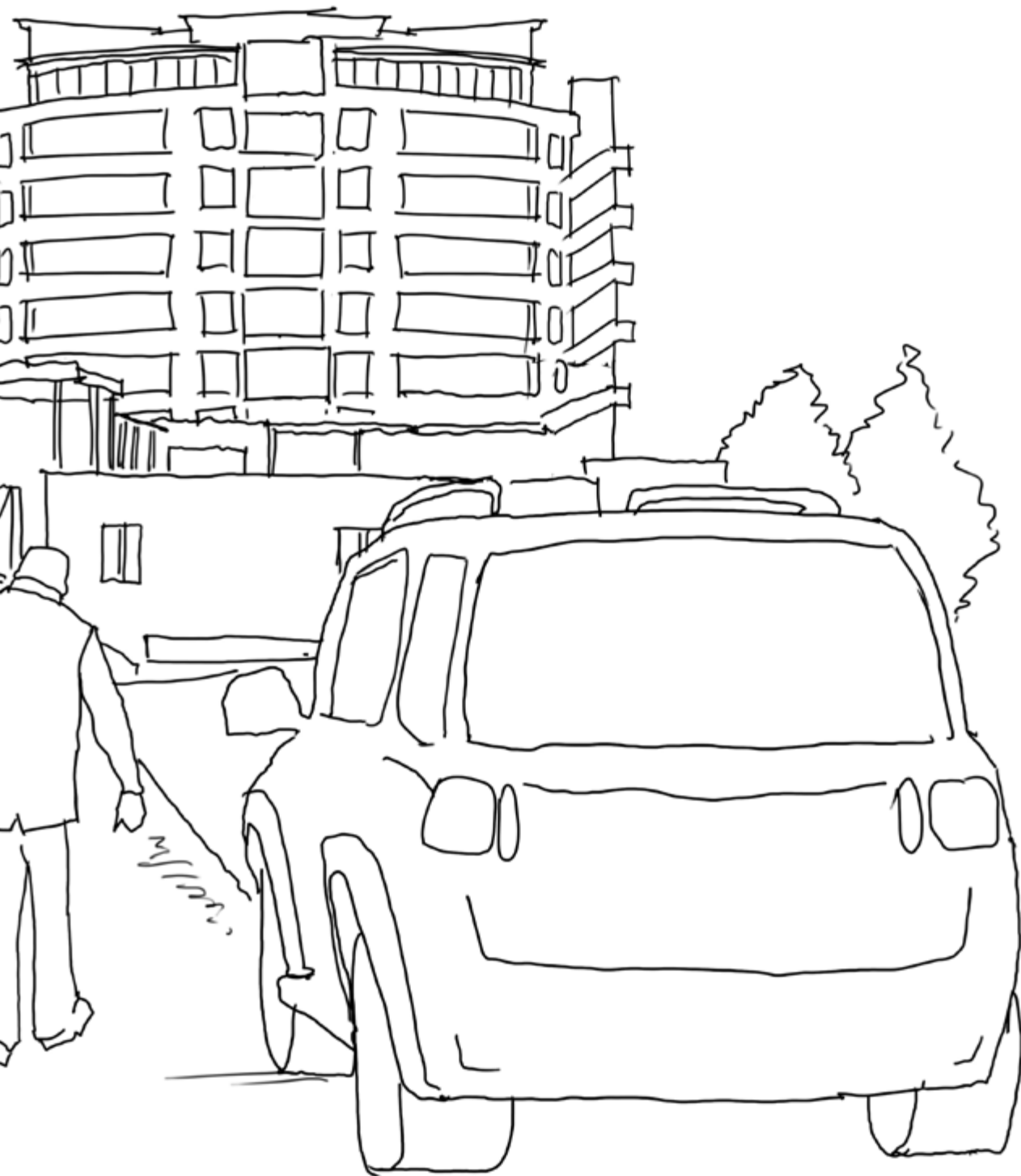
through the establishment of research platforms that would allow local and foreign scholars to gather and exchange information about urban trends, dynamics and challenges in a coherent and unified way.







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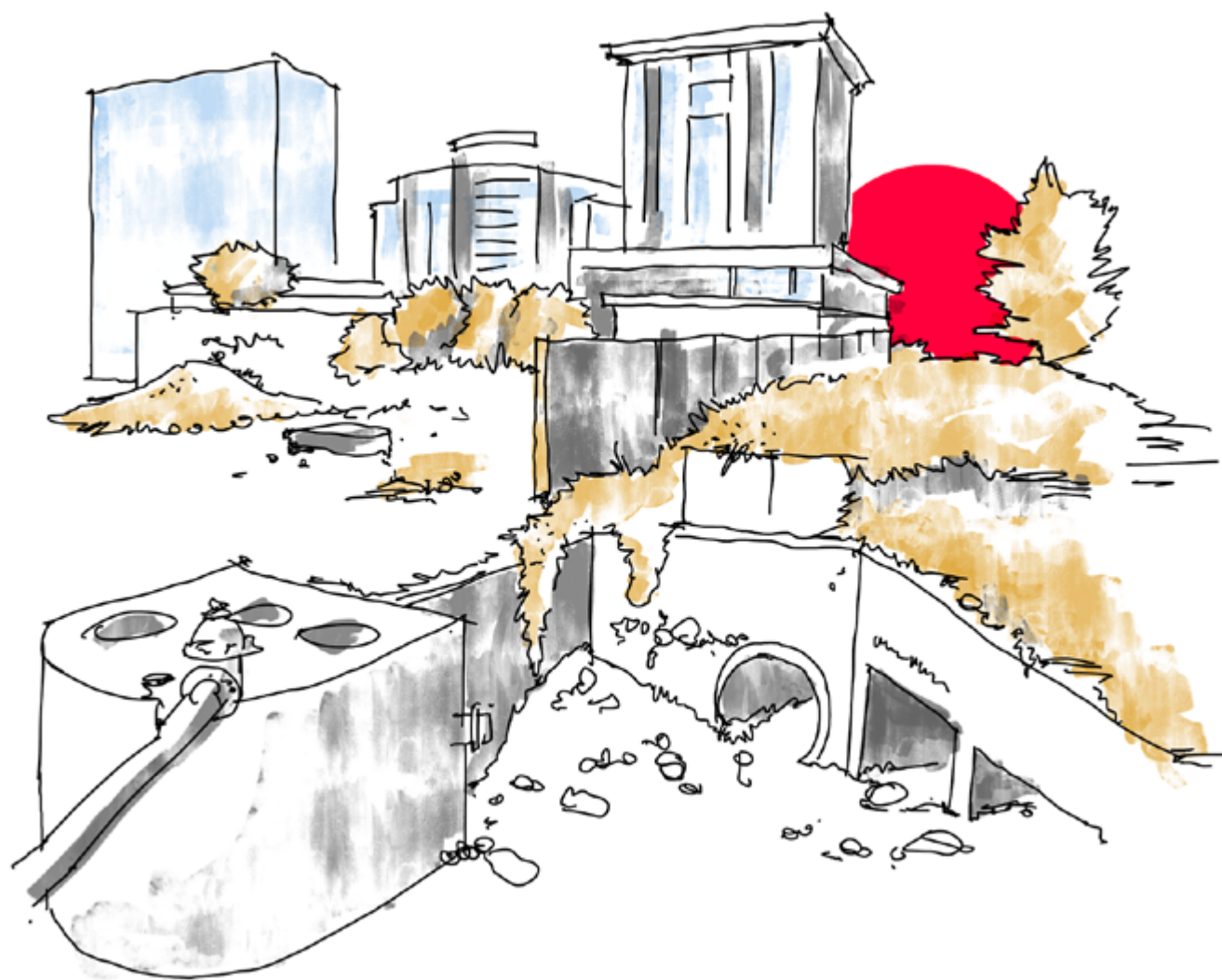
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